

THE HISTORY  
OF  
ANCIENT IRAN

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Eastern theories of monarchy, or even with Roman imperial institutions (not republican). Since our sources are so meagre there is no documentation for this other than the evidence of material culture, but it is certainly worth considering the possible role of east Iranian or Central Asian influences on the history of the entire Near East, and not just western Iran. The role was important not only in the syncretic Greco-Iranian art of the west, but also in ideas from this part of the world which came to the west through the intermediary of the Parthians, to whom we now turn.

## CHAPTER VIII

## THE PARTHIANS ON THE PLATEAU

*Literature:* The relatively recent but now classical work by N. Debevoise, *A Political History of Parthia* (Chicago, 1938) has not been superseded, for newer general books such as M. A. R. Colledge, *The Parthians* (London, 1967) or his *Parthian Art* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1977), with a large bibliography, or G. A. Koshechenko, *Kultura Parfi* (Moscow, 1966), add little to the work of Debevoise, except in the realm of art and culture. Monographs and articles on special subjects, especially Roman-Parthian relations, however, have added to our knowledge of the foreign affairs of the Parthians, while the results of archaeological excavations, as usual, provide new sources to augment our picture of Iran under the Parthians. It must be noted, however, that most of the excavations are not in Iran but outside the geographical boundaries of the present country. The sites and materials are as follows:

1. Nisa, near Ashkabad in Turkmenistan, was excavated by the Southern-Turkmen Combined Archaeological Expedition from 1948 to 1961, and many Parthian ostraca as well as material remains were uncovered. For a bibliography on the finds at Nisa see I. M. Diakonoff and V. A. Livshits, *Parthian Economic Documents from Nisa*, CII, Plates I-III, and Texts I (London, 1976-80), and M. E. Masson, *Pereleni ophibikovannykh rabot i materialov po tematike Yu TAKE* (Ashkabad, 1970), a bibliography of over 500 items.
  2. Kul-e Khwaja in Seistan. For a bibliography on the surveys of M. A. Stein and E. Herzfeld see L. Vanden Berghe, *Bibliographie analytique de l'archéologie de l'Iran ancien* (Leiden, 1979), 28-29. The fragmentary wall paintings found here are important for Parthian art, but they have been lost.
  3. Kangavar in Media. The work of Kamshaksh-Fard and his articles relating to it may be found in Vanden Berghe, *op. cit.*, 142. The temple of Anahita is the significant Parthian survival here, but later Sassanian changes or additions to the site have confused the picture.
  4. Bard-e Nismandeh and Masjid-e Sulaiman in Khuzistan. The work of R. Ghirshman culminated in two volumes on *Terrasses Sacrees*, in MDAFI, 45 (Paris, 1976). The two sites are remains of the kingdom of Elymais rather than Parthian, and the inscriptions are in a Semitic language rather than Parthian. Cf. Vanden Berghe, *op. cit.*, 85-88.
  5. Shahr-e Qumis near Damghan. The Parthian capital of Hekatompylos has been surveyed with sondages by D. Stromach and J. Hansman. For a bibliography see Vanden Berghe, *op. cit.*, 25-26.
- There are other minor sites in Iran, usually large sites with a Parthian stratum, and excavated or surveyed major towns influenced by the Parthians, or under their rule, are located outside of the boundaries of the present country, mostly in Iraq. Among them are Hatra, Nippur, Assur, Uruk, and in Syria, Dura Europos and Palmmyra, on which see Vanden Berghe, *op. cit.*, 259-60.

For Soviet works on the Parthians see T. N. Zadneprovskaya, "Bibliographie de travaux sovietiques sur les Parthes," *SI*, 4 (1975), 243-60. The work of Koshechenko are especially noteworthy, since he is the foremost Soviet specialist on the Parthians. See also the bibliography on archaeology in succeeding issues of *AMI*.

As with the Greco-Bactrians and Sakas, numismatics is of paramount importance in establishing the order of the Parthian kings, but it is more complicated than in the east because the quasi-title 'Arsaces' is used on most coins and not the personal name of the rulers. Other than Vanden Berghe, *op. cit.*, 262-68, see A. M. Simonetta and D. G. Sellwood, "Again on the Parthian Coinage from Mithradates II to Orodes II," *Quaderni ticinesi di numismatica e antichità classica* (Lugano, 1978), 95-119, and bibliography.

The articles on the beginnings of Parthian history, frequently repetitions, by J. Wolski, are too many to list, but see one of the latest, with bibliography of others, "L'origine de la relation d'Arrien sur la paire des frères Arsacides, Arsaces et Tiridate," in *Studies in the Sources of Pre-Islamic Central Asia*, ed. by J. Harmatta (Budapest, 1979), 67-74. The booklet by B. P. Lozinski, *The Original Homeland of the Parthians* (Mouton, The Hague, 1959), is unfortunately unusable.

Parthian inscriptions have not been assembled in a corpus, but a bibliography for them may be found in P. Gignoux, *Glossaire des Inscriptions Pehlavis et Parthes* (London, 1972), 43-44, to which may be added *Das Parthische Festschrift, Sarpat-i Zohab, Iranische Denkmäler*, Lieferung 7 (Berlin, 1976), 16.

The prime literary sources for the Parthians are chapters 41 and 42 of Justin's epitome of Pompeius Trogus, Apollodorus of Armenia (most as found in Strabo) and Arrian's *Parthika*, both in *Fig. Hist.* 156 and 779 respectively, as well as the *Parthian Stations* of Isidore. The many Classical sources on Roman-Parthian military and diplomatic relations are listed by Debevoise, to which work the reader is referred.

#### EXPANSION OF THE KINGDOM

Information on the origins of the Parthians comes from Justin (XLI, 1) who says they were originally exiles from Scythia, and Strabo (XI, 515) who says Arsaces was a Scythian man with the Aparni, a part of the Dahi, nomads who lived along the Oxus (lower Oxus) River, who invaded Parthia and conquered it. He continues that some say he was a Scythian while others claimed he was a Bactrian who fled from Diodorus and raised a revolt in Parthia. Arrian (and his successor the Byzantine writer Syncellus) tell a story about two brothers, Arsaces and Tiridates, who were insulted by the (Seleucid) satrap of Parthia. So they plotted with five companions and overthrew him thus freeing the Parthians.<sup>1</sup> The parallel of Arrian's account with the story of the plot of Darius against Gaumata is evident, but whether the whole story really has a mythological basis relating to the Discordides, or heavenly twins, as Wolski suggests, is uncertain.<sup>2</sup> The details of the lives of the early kings are clouded, but first we should ask if the story of the (A)parni invasion is believable and if there is any reason for their migration southwards into the Seleucid domains in the third century B.C.

The reality of the (A)parni is indicated not only by the mention of them in Strabo, in Ptolemy and in Justin (in the form Sparni) but also by the Middle Persian text called the *Bundahishn*, which says that one of the offspring of Sam 'gave the governorship of Aparshahr to Aparnak. Aparshahr is thus named because it is the land of Aparnak.'<sup>3</sup> Furthermore, Henning sought to trace east Iranian 'Parni' words in Armenian borrowings from Parthian, a west Iranian tongue, as well as elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> Thus we may accept the migration, more likely than an invasion, of the Parni south from the area of Khwarazm into Parthia in the first part of the third century B.C. The explanation of the name as 'mountain dwellers' and then their identification as inhabitants of the 'upper lands' (satriapes), later Aparshahr, is hardly correct though ingenious.<sup>5</sup> Reasons for the migrations of nomads could be many, drought, a search for better pasture lands, or political pressure. It is possible, as suggested by F. Koske, either that northern Parthia, from the Caspian Sea through present Turkmenistan to

<sup>1</sup> *Fig. Hist.*, Arrianos 156, 858-59. The variations in the name of the satrap have been discussed frequently by Wolski.

<sup>2</sup> Wolski, *supra*, *Porigine*, 71-73. He is convincing in his rejection of Arrian as a reliable source for the origin of the Arsacids.

<sup>3</sup> Ch. XXXV, 43-44, in the edition of B. T. Anklesaria, *Zind Akasah* (Bombay, 1956), 299, where the translation is wrong, the correct word being Aparnak, our Aparni.

<sup>4</sup> Henning, "Mitteliranisch" (ch. 6, n. 57), 93-94. <sup>5</sup> By Eliens, "Demawend" (ch. 1, n. 19), 347, 373, n. 244. Abarshahr, later the Nishapur area, can be well derived from 'the upper lands', but the Aparni are another problem, and they surely are not attested as 'mountainers.' The identification of the Aparni with the later Avars, proposed by W. Haussig, "Theophylakt's Exkurs über die skythischen Völker," *Byzantion*, 23 (1953), 329, is not acceptable either historically or linguistically.

Merv, was never held by the Seleucids, or that under Antiochus I short-lived forts to control the area were abandoned, and the whole territory was soon independent.<sup>6</sup> It is difficult to determine how much territory the Seleucid satrapy of Parthia did include, but in any case, it is reasonable to suppose that the northern desert areas and Khwarazm were not controlled by the Seleucids but did maintain an independent existence.

From Soviet archaeological excavations we know that not only the area of Khwarazm, south of the Aral Sea, but also the land to the east on the Jaxartes River contained towns and settlements as well as nomads in the period after Alexander's expedition. The names of various tribes which survive in Classical sources have been a great source of confusion and dispute among scholars, especially etymologies of names such as Masagetai, Derbikes, Apasakai, Sacaraucae and others.<sup>7</sup> It is not possible, in the present state of our knowledge, to assign to a Khwarazmian state of this period the Apasakai, as S. Tolstov does in various publications.<sup>8</sup> Also the identification of the state of K'ang-chu in Chinese sources, in this period located in the Talas and lower Jaxartes region, with either the Sacaraucae, or other peoples, is hardly possible with our lack of written sources. It is also not possible to assert that the expansion of the K'ang-chu drove the Parni south, and since information about the K'ang-chu is so little and shadowy, a proper history of this part of the world cannot be reconstructed.<sup>9</sup> Obviously the Jaxartes basin and other areas of western Turkestan were not just barren stretches of desert with a few nomads roaming over them, and settlements of Iranian speakers existed there, but we know little about them, and they seem to have had little influence on the movement of the Parni to the south into the province of Parthia (Khurasan).

Here we encounter the enigmatic Andragoras, who Justin (XLI, 4) says was the governor of Parthia, and he was overthrown and killed by Arsaces. The literature on the subject has been collected by Wolski, who correctly points out that the name is Greek, and there is no evidence that it is a translation of an Iranian name. He further suggests that his unique gold coin is a commemorative issue either at the time he declared his independence from the Seleucids, or simply a later emission by the

<sup>6</sup> F. Ya. Koske, "Pleniema severnoi Parfi v borbe s makedonskim zavoyevaniem," *VDI*, part 1 (1962), 113-25. He dwells mostly on Alexander's campaigns in Central Asia, and archaeological evidence, but the assertion that the entire area was not under Seleucid rule may be too sweeping a generalization.

<sup>7</sup> A summary of some of the etymologies may be found in Daffina, *supra*, *L'immigrazione*, 54-60. Bailey, among others, in many articles, has connected *saka* + *rauca* with Chinese Sai-wang 'Royal Scythians,' the Mas-Sak (Masagetai) with 'great Saka'; cf. his latest account in "North-Iranian Problems," *BSOAS*, 42 (1979), 207. Etymologies are always elusive and only concern us when they cause a revision of history or relate to other matters.

<sup>8</sup> S. P. Tolstov, *Drevnii Khorezm* (Moscow, 1949), 244, and in English with amplifications, "Scythians of the Aral Sea area and Khorezm," *XXIV International Congress of Orientalists, Tientsin* (Moscow, 1963), 157-63. Whether the Apasakai are to be identified with the Pasiuni as Tolstov, 162, followed by Daffina, *supra*, *L'immigrazione*, 57, asserts, is also uncertain.

<sup>9</sup> The identification of the K'ang-chu with *Kayg'at*, *Zk'o'dat* on a map (but not in the text) of Ptolemy, or with Kangha in the Avesta or later Kang-diz is hypothetical. See Markwart, *Wahin und Arang* (ch. 3, n. 41), 188, and B. A. Litvinski, "Das K'ang-chu-Sarmatische Farn," *CAJ*, 16 (1972), 250-52, with further references and bibliography.

Parthians to show their connection with the Seleucids and Alexander the Great.<sup>10</sup> The authenticity of the coins being subject to doubt, their minting as commemorative pieces at the time of Andragoras seems more reasonable than the postulation of a later propaganda reason. More than the problem of Andragoras, however, the chronology of the early Parthians has produced a controversial literature. Wolski has marshalled many arguments to show that the Parthian revolt occurred in 238 B.C. in the reign of Seleucus II, but neither he nor anyone else has satisfactorily explained the later adoption of an Arsacid era beginning in 247 B.C. rather than in 238.<sup>11</sup> Yet Wolski presents the following chronology: first invasion of the Parthi into Iran c. 280 B.C.; the Parthi under Arsaces conquer Asataene (*hodie* Quchan) c. 250; crowning of Arsaces in the capital of Asataene, Asak (or Arshak), according to Isidore of Charax (11) in 247 B.C.; revolt of Andragoras, satrap of Parthia, 245 B.C.; Diodorus proclaims his independence in Bactria, 239 B.C.; death of Andragoras and the taking of power in Parthia of Arsaces 238 B.C.; conquest of Hyrcania by Arsaces in 235 B.C.<sup>12</sup> The first date was found by Wolski to be the time when Merv and Herat were devastated by nomads at the end of the reign of Seleucus I, who sent a general Demodamas to punish them. The nomads were the Parthi, a division of the Dahhi who at this time were moving from the north towards the Caspian Sea.<sup>13</sup> The second date is a plausible guess, for the process of expansion of the Parthi must have taken time. The first Arsaces deserved to have his name honored,<sup>14</sup> as later Caesar and Augustus in the Roman Empire, for he probably transformed the marauding bands into a kingdom. Controversy exists, however, about the succession of early Parthian kings.

Fortunately, new, contemporary sources, the Parthian ostraca of Nisa, have been added to the Classical sources. On one ostrakon we find in the year 157, *ʾšk MLK*, BRY BRY ZY p[ry]jk BRY ʾHY BRY ZY] ʾšk or 91 B.C. King Arsaces, grandson

<sup>10</sup> J. Wolski, "Andragoras étaï-il Iranien ou Grec?" *SI* 4 (1975), 166-69. The name is attested in Greek papyri from Ptolemaic Egypt, and one can think of no reason why an Iranian would seek to translate his name into Greek. Wolski convincingly identifies the Andragoras of this period with the name of a high official in a Greek inscription from Gutgan under Antiochus I, and he convincingly rejects the historicity of the Andragoras mentioned by Justin (XII, 4) as satrap of Parthia under Alexander. The coins of Andragoras present similar problems to those of Sophytes and both may be contemporary satraps of c. 250 B.C.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. J. Wolski, "L'Histoire d'Arsace I<sup>er</sup>" *Historia*, 8 (1959), 235, and his "Arsace I<sup>er</sup> fondateur de l'état Parthe," *AI*, 3 (1974), 197.

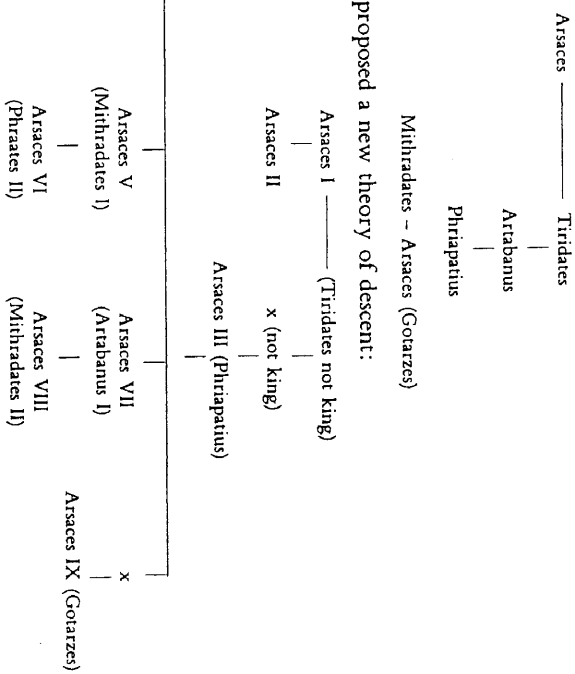
<sup>12</sup> Wolski, "Der Zusammenbruch der Seleukidenherrschaft in Iran im 3. Jh. v. Chr.," in *Altheim, op. cit.* [ch. 7, n. 1], 253-54.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 205-07. Strabo (XI, 511) says that the Aparthi, part of the Dahhi, are situated closest to

Hyrcania, but the rest of them extend to the land parallel to Aria (Herat). He continues that they overran Hyrcania, Nisaea and the plains of the Parthians, implying raids. Although Nisaea is the land on the northern edge of the Kopet Dagh range, it may have been considered part of the richer valley of Asataene to the south, where Arsaces was probably crowned, in a town named after him, as Wolski proposes. Strabo (XI, 511), however, says that the Aparthi made war, then peace and war again with the settled people, a more likely course of events than any planned conquest. This account is repeated with additions in his "Arsace I<sup>er</sup>, fondateur de l'état Parthe" [n. 11], 159-99.

<sup>14</sup> The older form of the name 'Arsaces,' Arsu for Artaxerxes II has been found in Akkadian: cf. A. Sachs, "Achaemenid Royal Names in Babylonian Astronomical Texts," *AJAH*, 4 (1979), 133-35.

of Phriapatius, son of the nephew of Arsaces.<sup>15</sup> The editors of the ostraca (Note 15, pp. 20-21) reconstructed the early genealogy of the Arsacids as follows.<sup>16</sup>



The name Phriapatius may appear in another ostrakon, but the inscription is damaged and incomplete and seems to say only that an Arsaces in the year 180 (of the Arsacid era = 68-67 B.C.) was a descendant of Phriapatius.<sup>17</sup> The latter was obviously an important king in the dynasty, and there is every reason to identify him with the third king of the Parthians, but why was he more important apparently, in the ostraca inscriptions, than his predecessors? The proposal of Koshelchenko answers this question, and his suggestion in regard to the Tiridates problem does attempt to reconcile Justin (Trogu) with Arrian (and Syncellus), and as such is a good guess. Otherwise we must believe either Arrian or Justin, since they conflict. The name Artaabanus for the second

<sup>15</sup> I. M. Dyakonov and V. A. Livshits, *Dokumeny iz Niry IV, do II, e.* (Moscow, 1960), 113 and plate. The brackets are smudges on the ostrakon and within them are reconstructions. This is a strange ostrakon with only these two lines, whereas other ostraca are accounts of quantities of wine from vineyards in various estates. The expression BRY ʾHY BRY, the Parthian form of these Aramaic masks being unknown, is attested only here.

<sup>16</sup> See the remarks of G. A. Koshelchenko, "Genealogiya Berrykh Arshakidov," in B. G. Galurov, ed., *Istoriya i kulturna narodoi Srednei Azii* (Moscow, 1976), 34. This follows Justin (XLI, 5) who says that Arsaces II was also called Arsaces and was followed by Phriapatius. A bibliography on this ostrakon is given on pp. 36-37.

<sup>17</sup> I. M. Dyakonov and V. A. Livshits, "Novye nakhodki dokumentov v Staroi Nice," *Prednaznatskii Sbornik*, 2 (Moscow, 1966), 143, n. 28, and plates 10 and 10a. The historical interpretation of these documents may not be as much as the editors suggested, especially in regard to the genealogy of the Arsacids. Altheim, *op. cit.* [ch. 6, n. 19], 446, gives Arsaces I two sons, one Arsaces II and the other the father of Phriapatius.

or third ruler of the Arsacid dynasty is not attested, and if one follows Justin, the son of Arsaces I could be assigned that name. With Phriapattus, however, we are on firmer ground, and one may assign his rule to the aftermath of the invasion of Antiochus III from whom Arsaces (II according to Justin, III according to Arrian) fled. After the retreat of Antiochus III, the Parthians seem to have turned their attention to the east against the Greco-Bactrians. Justin (XLI, 5), however, ascribes the conquest of the Mardî on the southeastern shores of the Caspian Sea, to the short reign of Phraates, elder brother of Mithradates I, and this would be an expected expansion of Parthian authority at this time. We have already seen how several provinces were wrested from the Greco-Bactrians, but under Mithradates I Parthian expansion to the east is unclear.

In Media the situation is also unclear, even more so after the discovery of a Greek inscription on a relief of Herakles near Behistun, speaking of Cleomenes a satrap of the 'upper provinces' in 149-48 B.C.<sup>18</sup> The easiest explanation of this is to assume that the Seleucid satrap of Media, Timarkhos, lost some territory in the area of present Tehran (Rhages) and farther east to Mithradates, while the Seleucid reconquest did not recover this land but maintained rule in Ecbatana.<sup>19</sup> According to Justin (XLI, 6) Mithradates had to fight many times in Media, and it is conceivable that the Seleucids held only the city and the lowlands, to the west of Ecbatana, at the time the relief of Herakles was carved.<sup>20</sup> Since the earliest Babylonian documents dated in the name of Arsaces begin in 141 B.C. after the defeat of the Seleucids in Mesopotamia, we may assume an interval of time of several years for the Parthians to move from Media to Mesopotamia and to the capture of Seleucia. The defeat of Demetrius II the Seleucid ruler was not accomplished in one battle or the conquest of Mesopotamia in one campaign, and the advance of Mithradates apparently was not swift.<sup>21</sup> It generally has been supposed that the Parthian king was called away to Hyrcania, as Justin (XLI, 6) tells us, after which Demetrius II was captured by a general of Mithradates and sent in captivity to Mithradates about a year later in 140-139 B.C., but the Parthian king only lived another year himself after having secured the submission of Elymais.<sup>22</sup> For further information we must turn to the numismatists, some of whom assert that only under Mithradates I did the Parthian rulers begin to strike coins, and all earlier attributions are false.

The problem with early Parthian numismatics is that, unlike the coins of Bactria and northwest India, only the name or title Arsaces appears on the coins and identities must be established by style, the busts, or figures and titles. Le Rider argued that since the Dahi, of whom the Parni were a branch, served in the army of Antiochus III, according to Polybius (V, 79) and Livy (37, 40), therefore the Arsacid rulers were vassals of the Seleucids and did not have the right to strike coins until Mithradates I

<sup>18</sup> Cf. chapter on the Seleucids, and esp. Morghin *op. cit.* [ch. 6, n. 93], 178-80.

<sup>19</sup> The renaming of Rhagae-Europos to Arakia may have occurred under Phraates I; cf. M.-L. Chaumont, "Études d'histoire Parthe II," *Syria*, 50 (1973), 204.

<sup>20</sup> At this time on the plateau Bacaris or Vagars could have served as satrap of Media under Mithradates I, according to Justin.

<sup>21</sup> For references cf. Debevoise, *op. cit.* [ch. 7, n. 64], 22-23. The coinage of Seleucia indicates that Mithradates struck coins there the first time only for a year; cf. Le Rider, *op. cit.* [ch. 6, n. 25], 361-62.

<sup>22</sup> On these events see Will, *supra*, [ch. 6, n. 32], 2, 343-44, with references; also Debevoise, *op. cit.* [ch. 7, n. 64], 24-25.

who liberated the Parthians from this status.<sup>23</sup> Other numismatists support a coinage going back to the first king, although they admit that the number of coins greatly increases under Mithradates I.<sup>24</sup> It is difficult to support the thesis that until Mithradates I the Parthians were only vassals of Antiochus III and had no right to mint coins, while the Dahi mercenaries of Antiochus III give no indication of Parthian submission to the Seleucids. As we have seen in the previous chapter, both the Parthian king and Euthydemus of Bactria made treaties with Antiochus III, not as submissive vassals, but as allies. With the withdrawal of Antiochus III from the east and his defeat by the Romans at Magnesia in 189 B.C., it is difficult to believe that the Parthians continued to act as subjects of the Seleucids. The symbolism on early Parthian coins of the seated royal archer on the reverse has been explained as the giving of the bow, as the symbol of authority, to the king from the gods, a practice attested for the Sakas, and this would not suggest any position as vassals of the Seleucids.<sup>25</sup> The questions which early Parthian rulers struck coins and where the mint sites were located have not been answered, but inasmuch as mints do not require heavy equipment, but are even mobile, the location of a mint at Nisa, Asak or Dara in the north Parthian homeland is not impossible.<sup>26</sup>

The conquests of Mithradates I brought the Parthians from a small kingdom in the east to a position of power in the arena of the Near East, but after the Parthian king's death in 138 B.C. a campaign of recovery of eastern domains by Antiochus VII began. Mithradates I had struck in Seleucia on the Tigris coins with the term *philhellene*, probably as a sign of conciliation with the Greek population, and possibly as a sign of a special relationship of that great city with the Parthian conqueror.<sup>27</sup> Parthian rule in Seleucia continued after the death of Mithradates under Phraates II until Antiochus VII appeared, after consolidating his position in Syria and the west. This was not until 131 B.C., however, as can be determined by cuneiform documents from

<sup>23</sup> Le Rider, *op. cit.* [ch. 6, n. 25], 315-22, with references to previous scholars, such as J. de Morgan and E. T. Newell (with certain reserves). The attribution to the mint at Ecbatana of issues of Mithradates I, with the title 'great king,' may be attributed to the conquest of that mint site c. 150-147 B.C.

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Wroth's catalogue of the British Museum and A. Simonetta, "La monetazione Parthica dal 247 al 122 a.C.," *Rivista Italiana di Numismatica*, 16 (1968), 20-25; M. T. Abgaryan and D. G. Sellwood, "A Hoard of Early Parthian Drachms," *NC*, 11 (1971), 115-18, and G. A. Koshel'enko, "Nekotorые voprosy ranneistorii Parthii," *VDI*, no. 1 (1968), 53, and his "Monetnoe delo Parthii pri Mitrdate I," *Numismatika i Epigrafika*, 10 (Moscow, 1972), 81, hold to an earlier coinage for the Parthians.

<sup>25</sup> D. S. Raevskii, "K voprosu ob obnosovanii tsarskoi vlasti v Parthii," in B. G. Gafurov, ed., *Stelinyje Azija v drevnosti i srednevekovie* (Moscow, 1977), 81-87. His analysis of the archer-chief among the Scythians, and the Parthian counterpart

of this, is convincing. For an etymology of the name Sinaruces see Henning, "Mitteliranisch" [ch. 6, n. 57], 41, n. 1.

<sup>26</sup> On these towns see Chaumont, *op. cit.* [n. 19], 197-222. It is hardly possible to trace a succession of Parthian capitals from Asak, Dara, and Nisa through Hekatompylos, Arakia-Rhages to Ecbatana as the progress of Parthian arms to the west since the 'capital' in the period before Mithradates II changed considerably, and we are unsure which city was a capital and which just an important center.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. R. H. McDowell, *Coins from Seleucia on the Tigris* (Ann Arbor, 1935), 218, and Sellwood, *op. cit.* [ch. 7, n. 57], 38. The copper coinage issued by Seleucia under Parthian rule indicates a greater autonomy for the city than it had under Seleucid control; see also McDowell, *Stamped and Inscribed Objects from Seleucia* (Ann Arbor, 1935), 6, and Le Rider, *op. cit.* [ch. 6, n. 25], 373. On the coinage of Seleucia under Mithradates see Koshel'enko, *op. cit.* [n. 24], 100.

Mesopotamia.<sup>28</sup> The exact time of the march of Antiochus VII into Mesopotamia is difficult to establish, but if his entry into Seleucia was in 130 after winning three battles against Parthian forces, presumably in northern Mesopotamia, we may suggest that the reconquest of Mesopotamia took a number of months in 130 B.C. As the sources say, many local princes joined Antiochus who took the title 'great king in honor of his victories.'<sup>29</sup> The continued campaign against the Parthians on the Iranian plateau has presented some discord in the interpretation of meager sources: It is not possible to determine when precisely Demetrius II, who had remained in Parthian captivity so many years, was released by Phraates, while other details are also disputed. Coins from Susa indicate that in the year 130–129 that city reverted from Parthian to Seleucid allegiance and apparently many areas on the Iranian plateau also threw away their fealty to Phraates for Antiochus VII.<sup>30</sup> One extensive study of the Parthian campaign of Antiochus argues that he went as far as the homeland of the Parthians and it was there that he wintered and then lost his life in the early spring of 129 B.C.<sup>31</sup> This is unlikely, since Ecbatana is neither mentioned in any source, nor were any coins of Demetrius or Antiochus VII struck there, which seems odd if the latter actually wintered in the homeland of the Parthians. Refusing the offer of the Parthians to negotiate peace, Antiochus, probably in Media, was surprised with a small body of his troops and either was killed or committed suicide.<sup>32</sup> Seleucid control disintegrated and the Parthians re-established their rule. Phraates appointed a certain Himerus, a Greek to judge by his name, governor of Babylonia and left for the east where the Central Asian nomads, we have seen in the last chapter, threatened Parthian rule.<sup>33</sup> According to Justin (XLI, 1), Phraates had hired Saka mercenaries for his war against Antiochus, but the swift demise of the latter obviated any need for the Saks who were not paid, and rose against Phraates. The latter moved against them with Greeks and others from Seleucid forces now incorporated in his own army, but these on the first occasion abandoned Phraates who was killed by the Saks in 128 B.C. The nomads were powerful, for the uncle and successor of Phraates, Artabanus lost his life fighting them in 123 B.C.<sup>34</sup> There is no information about the state of affairs in the east after Artabanus, but one may presume that for a while Parthian prestige was at a low ebb. In the west, however, we are better informed not only because of literary notices,

<sup>28</sup> See references in Debevoise, *op. cit.* [ch. 7, n. 64], 29, n. 3.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 32.

<sup>30</sup> Le Rider, *op. cit.* [ch. 6, n. 25], 377–78. No coins of Antiochus from the mint of Ecbatana, however, have been found.

<sup>31</sup> T. Fischer, *Untersuchungen zum Parthierkrieg Antiochos' VII.*, (Ph.D. thesis, Tübingen, 1970), 39. His insistence that in Josephus the term Parthyene means the homeland of the Parthians while Parthia or Parthana meant the whole empire, and Antiochus went into the former, is questionable. Actually Josephus, *Ant. Ind.* XIII, 253, uses the former, on this one occasion, in an offhand remark that Demetrius was released at the time that Antiochus invaded Parthyene, whereas elsewhere

but also cuneiform records and a more ample coinage aid in the reconstruction of history. After Antiochus VII lost his life Seleucia and much of Mesopotamia reverted to Parthian rule. But the weakness of the Seleucids had not only induced Bactria, Parthia and much of the Iranian plateau to secede from Seleucid rule, but also parts of Mesopotamia became independent or semi-independent. In the south the kingdoms of Characene and of Elymais make an appearance on the scene at this time and there is no reason to suppose that in the east there was more centralized control over Sistan, Kerman and elsewhere than in Mesopotamia.

The Parthian state did not disintegrate, however, and the reign of Mithradates II (123–c. 87 B.C.) marks a high point in Parthian central power. He reconquered Babylonia, which had at first maintained a quasi-independent position under Himerus, who seems to have oppressed the local population greatly according to Justin (XLI, 1) and Diodorus (XXIV, 18). The former opinion, according to coins supposedly struck by Himerus, that he became an independent king of Babylonia, is no longer accepted.<sup>35</sup> The sequence of events is uncertain, but it would seem that Hyaspasines, the ruler of Characene at the mouth of the Persian Gulf, although he fought Himerus and others, did not occupy either Seleucia or Susa, both of which, according to the coinage, remained in Parthian hands.<sup>36</sup> Just how much Mithradates had to reconquer is difficult to determine, but probably not as much as hitherto assumed. He did, of course, defeat and secure the submission of Characene, and overstrikes of Mithradates on the coins of Hyaspasines exist. He took the title 'king of kings', the first Arsacid to do so, and he is pictured on his later coins wearing a distinctive crown or tiara. Whether this indicates a new order of government of the Parthians with vassal states and semi-independent cities such as Seleucia and Susa is unknown, but at some time, perhaps under Mithradates, the Parthian state became a loose empire rather than a tribal kingdom, which question will be examined later. The long rule of Mithradates II, in any case, was a time of consolidation of Parthian institutions as well as expansion. For the first time we hear of Armenia, where after the fall of Antiochus III, according to Strabo (XI, 528) two of his generals carved out kingdoms for themselves, 'Greater' Armenia under Artaxias (Artaşēs in Armenian), and another centered on Sophene and the upper Euphrates area under Zartadres.<sup>37</sup> Antiochus IV invaded 'Greater' Armenia and secured the submission of Artaxias

he does not use Parthia or Parthana, but always plural *ἐκ Παρθῶν* for 'from Parthia' and *εἰς Παρθῶν* into Parthia. Athenaeus *Deipnosophistae* (XII, 540) uses the more likely term 'Media' instead of Parthia.

<sup>32</sup> Fischer, *op. cit.* [n. 31], 46, favors the suicide report. Whether Ecbatana became a Parthian

capital in the time of Phraates is also uncertain.

<sup>33</sup> Debevoise, *op. cit.* [ch. 7, n. 64], 35, follows Diodorus (XXXIV, 21) and Posidonius in calling Himerus an Hyrcanian, which is possible, but his name is Greek, attested in Papyrus from Egypt and he then would have been a Greek settled in Hyrcania or a native who took a Greek name.

<sup>34</sup> There is no reason to reject the statement of Justin (XLI, 2) that he died fighting the Thogarii

(corrected to Thocarii) as Tarn, *Seleucid-Parthian Studies* (London, 1930), 13–14 does. This Artabanus is sometimes called Artabanus II, and if the second ruler of the dynasty Arsaces II had the name Artabanus, he was obviously the first. We do not know, however, and without evidence it is better to call the uncle of Phraates by the numeral one. The passage in the prolegomenon to book 41 of Trogu's (ed. by O. Seel in Leipzig, 1955) has the following: *successores* (of Arsaces I) *deinde eius Artabanus et Tigranes cognominis Deus, a quo subacta est Media et Mesopotamia*, which is quite unreliable.

<sup>35</sup> For his position as king see S. A. Palls, "The History of Babylon 538–93 B.C.," in *Studia Orientalia, Ioanni Pedersen septuagenario*, ed. by F.

Hviidberg (Copenhagen, 1953), 289–90. He well may have destroyed the city of Babylon, but Hyaspasines is mentioned as ruler there in 127–126 B.C. in a cuneiform tablet; cf. Fischer, *op. cit.* [n. 31], 19, for references.

<sup>36</sup> Le Rider, *op. cit.* [ch. 6, n. 25], 382–83, and Fischer, *op. cit.* [n. 31], 58–59, for other references. See also H. Klengel, "Babylon zur Zeit der Perser, Griechen und der Parther," *Forschungen und Berichte, Staatliche Museen zu Berlin*, 6 (1962), 40–53.

<sup>37</sup> On this period of Armenian history see Ya. A. Manandyan, *Tigran Vloroi i Rimi* (Erevan, 1943), 18–21, with references to Polybius and other sources.

ruled about seven years, and his coins are found in Susa, as well as elsewhere, an indication that he recovered most of Iran, including Babylonia, for the Parthians.

With the accession of Phraates III, son of Sinatruces, sometime between 70 and 68, for the actual date of death of his father is uncertain, the history of Parthia becomes connected with Roman history, and the sources increase considerably. Also from the time of Phraates, we may suggest that institutions are fixed and the next two and one half centuries down to the fall of the Parthians are filled primarily with internal struggles for supreme power, and with the external wars with the Romans. The eastern frontiers seem to have been more or less stable, especially with the rise of the Kushans and their creation of a centralized state; thus Roman-Parthian relations are of paramount importance. It seems appropriate that before discussing this comparatively well-known phase of Parthian history we should examine the structure and institutions of the Parthians as far as we can reconstruct them.

#### THE ORGANIZATION OF RULE

The position of the Parthian king in the eyes of his subjects probably changed as the empire grew out of a small state with a background of nomadic traditions of rule. The ideology of kingship would be composed of three traditions, or rather an amalgam of the nomadic (development of Indo-Iranian concepts), Greek, and ancient Near Eastern (primarily Achaemenid) traditions.<sup>46</sup> It is, of course, difficult to disentangle the three, but elements of all appear in Parthian royal ideology, as much as it can be determined from coins (legends as well as crowns), from a few details in literary sources, and from our knowledge of both earlier and later practices and beliefs in Iran, or those of neighboring peoples. The nomadic, or what might also be called Indo-Iranian, beliefs probably included the concept of the royal *farn* or 'glory' which was so prominent among Iranian peoples everywhere. The belief in the investiture of the chief of a tribe with a bow by a deity, as pictured on the earliest coins, has been mentioned, and one may elucidate here briefly the idea of the royal 'glory' or 'fortune.' Much has been written about the *farn*, its etymology and meaning, but here we are only interested in any significance it had for the Parthian rulers.<sup>47</sup> At the outset one should note the existence of names with *farn* in them on the ostraca from Nisa such as *Prnhw*, *Prnhg* and *Mtrprn*, literally 'the glory of Mithra.'<sup>48</sup> The *farn* is an ancient concept, and in the Avesta we hear of the *farn* or 'glory of the Aryan lands' (Yasht, 19, 57 and 64 foll.), whereas later we learn of the *farn* of the 'king of kings' or the *farn-e tzadi* or 'divine *farn*' as found in the *Shahname*, and this *farn* is the guide of the king in his rule.<sup>49</sup> When Taeger says that the Parthian kings had a dynastic cult

without a nomenclal or divine character, this is true if he is refuting the divinization of the ruler, but it is not so if one considers the *farn* as a divine concept.<sup>50</sup> The dynastic cult, or the cult of ancestors, may be characterized as the same as the Hellenistic cult of dead heroes, combined with an ancient and widespread cult of ancestors, to make a royal cult, the implementation of which was coterminal with the state's boundaries. The Seleucid and Greco-Bactrian kings' use of the epithet *ἑσος* on coins apparently was bound to the title or office of king, or to the institution of kingship, and was not a personal divinization, and this was the same for the Arsacids.<sup>51</sup> The Hellenistic ruler cult was adopted by the Parthians, but probably not at the beginning of their rule, when Central Asian or tribal notions of kingship were predominant. So we may conjecture that Arsaces I convinced his friends that the royal *farn* had descended on him and his family, which was destined to rule an even larger area than at the commencement of his rule. Obviously power and success in conquest were elements in the rise of the Parthians. In time, Achaemenid concepts of kingship joined the ancient practices and beliefs together with the heritage of Hellenistic kingship of the Seleucids. This may be seen in the adoption of the title 'king of kings' by Mithradates II and by his use of a distinctive crown or tiara instead of the usual diadem of the Hellenistic rulers. Kosheleiko has described the development of Parthian ruling ideology on the basis of their coins, first with the simple name Arsaces without a title, which he claims shows that Arsaces did not revolt against the Seleucids but simply took over the right of coinage because of the absence of Seleucid authority.<sup>52</sup> Also the existence of an ever burning fire in the town of Asak where Arsaces I was first proclaimed king, as attested by Isidore of Charax 11, suggests that the act of proclaiming a king had a religious significance. One could also suggest that the formation of a royal ideology began with Arsaces I, who must have had a strong personality to have given his name as a title to all succeeding Parthian kings. This fact in itself attests to the importance of a royal family or royal clan of the Arsacids in the political ideology of the Parthians. The protocol of crowning of the king was undoubtedly also developed over time, usually with the head of the Suren family in the capacity of the one who put the crown on the king's head.<sup>53</sup>

discussion of the concept of *farn* in Iran and neighboring concepts see F. Dornik, *Early Christian and Byzantine Political Philosophy*, 1 (Cambridge, Mass., 1966), 85. For Hellenistic influences and a discussion of headgear, see Ritter, *op. cit.* [ch. 6, n. 28], 27-30, 125.

<sup>50</sup> Taeger, *op. cit.*, [n. 47], 432. The concept of *farn* was more than a mere charismatic exaltation of the king (p. 402) but was similar to Greek *τύχη* and *δόξα*. Neither the Indo-European ramifications of the concept nor the religious implications of kingship can be discussed here, for which see G. Widengren, "The Sacred Kingship of Iran," *Numeri*, Supplement 4 (Leiden, 1959), 424-55.

<sup>51</sup> Taeger, *op. cit.*, 329, 333, 432. Herakles, a divinized hero, was made the ancestor of the Seleucids. As Taeger aptly says, the Hellenistic ruler cult had many opponents but hardly any martyrs (p. 307). On the Hellenistic ruler cult see

H. Dörrie, *Der Königskult des Antiochos von Kommagene*, *Abh. GWG*, 60 (1964), 236 pp.

<sup>52</sup> G. A. Kosheleiko, "Tzarstaya vlast' i ee obosnovanie v rannei Parfi," in B. G. Gafurov, ed., *Istorija Iransego Gosudarstva i Kul'tura* (Moscow, 1971), 213.

<sup>53</sup> On the crowning of various kings, with sources, see Ritter, *op. cit.* [ch. 6, n. 28], 168. Trajan crowned his own Arsacid candidate for the Parthian throne in Ctesiphon, but this only indicates the symbolic importance of the ceremony. For the crowns see H. von Gall, "Beobachtungen zum arsakidischen Diadem und zur parthischen Bildkunst," *Isis*, 191/20 (1969-70), 299-318, and for the curious crown of Phraates III see J. Sugiyama, "Some Problems of Parthian Kings' Crowns," *Oriens*, 9 (Tokyo, 1973), 31-41.

<sup>46</sup> It is interesting to see the same tripartite division applied to architecture, based on religious beliefs, by G. A. Kosheleiko, *Kul'tura Parfi* (Moscow, 1966), 33.

<sup>47</sup> The fundamental work on the word and its etymology is by H. W. Bailey, *Zoroastrian Problems in the Ninth-Century Books*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1971), 1-78 and xvii-xi; J. Grepin, "Xvaranah," *JIES*, 1 (1973), 232-41, with references to articles by J. Duchesne-Guillemin and others. Cf. E. Imoto,

"Av. xvaranah," *Bulletin of the Society for Near Eastern Studies in Japan*, 17 (1974), 75-86. English summary p. 183, where the word is connected with 'earing.' On the charisma of the king see F. Taeger, *Charisma*, 1 (Stuttgart, 1957), 304-431.

<sup>48</sup> For references see Livinskii, *op. cit.* [n. 9], 2, 50.

<sup>49</sup> For a study of the concept in the *Shahname* see Manuchehr Khudāyār Mahābārī, *Farr-e yezdāni dar id'rihi-e adyan* (Tehran, 1972), 1-42. For a

Much has been written about the institution of 'double kingship' in Iran, but it seems that the association of the son (crown prince) or successor of the king with the ruler to insure continuity has been mistaken for the institution of two kings, as in ancient Sparta and elsewhere.<sup>54</sup> In any case, there is no evidence for an institution of two kings among the Parthians, even if etymologically the title of *bidaksh*, which we meet below, meant 'second king', which itself is uncertain.<sup>55</sup> The formulae and protocols of rule were highly developed under the Parthians, but so were they under the Roman emperors. How much of the hyperbole of kingship, such as the comment of Ammianus (XXIII, 6, 6) that the Parthians worshiped Arsaces as a god, can be believed as real and how much of it is political propaganda is difficult to determine. With Mithradates II, however, we can see the evidence of such political propaganda on his coins and with his title. It is unlikely that his reign marks a change in political ideology or development of the past; rather a significant progress in the continuing evolution or development of an ongoing Parthian royal protocol and belief is indicated. The usurpation of the title 'king of kings' by the Armenian Tigranes II is only an indication of the realities of power and the importance of the developing Parthian ideology in regard to kingship elsewhere in the Near East.

The aristocracy and its assumption of titles paralleled the ideology of kingship but changes took place to a greater extent in this domain. Presumably the Parthi, when they moved into Parthia, were still in a form of society characteristic of steppe tribes similar to the Indo-Iranian period. The division of that society into the classic tripartite warriors, priests and the rest of the people, we may assume, had developed towards a more differentiated class system of nobles of various grades, with common folk also divided according to professions and beliefs. Likewise we may assume a continuation of the heritage of the tribe, clan and family organization of pastoral societies. The mixture of old and new in the case of the Parthians produced a knightly or feudal class, each member of which was called *azat*, which, as Perikhanian has shown, should not be confused with the word meaning 'free', although the two later did fall together.<sup>56</sup> The family of the king had a special position, especially the crown prince or heir apparent, the *vispuhr*, but as mentioned, the royal family of the Arsacids all participated in the heritage or patrimony of the ruler, and this special position, as argued by Perikhanian, was called *vāspuhrakanih* (pp. 19–21). The proliferation and differentiation of titles in the Parthian court cannot be dated any more than changes in functions or the use of honorifics as well as titles. For example, the Parthian title \**padāgrītu*, attested in Syriac, Sogdian and at Hatra, may well have been coined by the Parthian kings to designate either a regent or the successor to the throne, but it may have been, on the other hand, an honorific designation rather than a fixed title

<sup>54</sup> Cf. Frye, "Remarks" [ch. 7, n. 65], 78–82, for further references.

<sup>55</sup> Szemerényi "Tanica V." [ch. 4, n. 63], 391.

The etymology, meaning 'second ruler', is no assurance of the existence of such an officer; rather one would expect this originally to be an appellation given to a confidant or a close friend of the king regardless of office.

<sup>56</sup> A. Perikhanian, "Notes sur le lexique iranien et arménien," *REA*, 4 (1968), 5–30. The secondary meaning of *vāspuhrakan* as princes who were not sons of the king has only confused the matter. Note also that a feminine form \**višdaxta* 'princess' is presumed for Parthian by Perikhanian.

in a hierarchy or organization.<sup>57</sup> As the Parthians expanded, they encountered all kinds of principalities, city states, or other forms of rule which had evolved under the Seleucids, or which had come into existence when Seleucid rule weakened or collapsed. If we may take Armenia as a kind of 'microcosm' of the Parthian 'macrocosm', then the remark that Armenia was a collection of royal domains, military vicerealties, separate principalities and temple lands, may be applied with even more cogency to the Arsacid kingdom.<sup>58</sup> Furthermore, titles which appear in the Parthian east may not have had any currency in the western part of the territories ruled by the Arsacids. For example, the term *kanarang* or *katadanga*, which we shall discuss in the chapter on the Kushans, is not found in the west. We may suppose that the Parthi aristocracy intermarried with both the local, settled Parthian aristocracy, as well as with any Greek or Macedonian aristocracy. By the end of the second century B.C. they were also undoubtedly mixed with local Iranian upper classes, not to mention any Saka or other intruders. As Wolski has convincingly shown, after the consolidation of the Parthian state on the basis of tribal support of the king, in its expansion the ruler, following Hellenistic tradition, had to engage mercenaries to further his ambitions.<sup>59</sup> Until the first century B.C. the mixed Parthian aristocracy and the mercenaries fought together for common booty and for the ruler, but later internecine struggles between various pretenders to the throne supported by different groups of the aristocracy were endemic. As the boundaries of the Parthian state became fixed, especially in the west by the Roman Empire, revenues and booty based on an expansionist policy greatly declined, and the influence of the ruler fell as that of the aristocracy rose. For more than two centuries Parthia was on the defensive, for on the whole the Romans were aggressors in the wars between them. One may describe a change in Parthia in the first century B.C. as a transition from the old world of the Hellenistic monarchies to a new 'feudal' age, which is the picture of the Parthian state given by Classical sources. The Parthian aristocracy became wealthy and powerful as the influence of the king sank. At the same time the traditions, protocol and nominal allegiance to royalty were preserved and even fostered.<sup>60</sup> Society became more fixed in various classes and hierarchies.

The upper nobility, many of whom were relatives of the king, were given provinces to govern, as were brothers or immediate members of the king's family.<sup>61</sup> The relationship between these governors and a court nobility is unknown, and it is unwise to project backwards information from the Sasanian period except to the

<sup>57</sup> For references see D. Harnack *apud* Altheim, *op. cit.* [ch. 6, n. 49], 516–19. Gershevitch proposed the form \**padāgrītu*, which is preferable to Harnack's \**padgrāb*. His further suggestion that the Parthian word is a calque on Greek *δαδός* may be true, but the latter was hardly a real title in Hellenistic times. Other than the *vispuhr*, usually written as BR BYT', we find 'princes' *višdaxta* (BR BYTH) and the general designations *hšpynd* 'prince', *hšvūny* 'lord', as well as other words for the rulers.

<sup>58</sup> R. H. Hewsen, "Introduction to Armenian Historical Geography," *REA*, 13 (1979), 96. Much

in Armenia parallels Parthia, but one should not assume that the situation in Armenia was a carbon copy of Parthia.

<sup>59</sup> J. Wolski, "Le rôle et l'importance des mercenaires dans l'état Parthe," *IA*, 5 (1965), 107.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. J. Wolski, "L'aristocratie parthe et les commencements du féodalisme en Iran," *IA*, 7 (1967), 133–44, with further references.

<sup>61</sup> E.g., Vologeses gave the governorship of Media to one brother Pacorus and Armenia to another brother Tiridates, acc. to Tacitus, *Annals* (XV, 2). The Greek *μεινωτάτες* corresponds to the *hšvūnzgān*.



period just before the end of Parthian rule. We may suppose, however, the existence and power of the class of great nobility, the Sasanian *wizurgān*, attached to court and having a high position in society because of relationship to the king and presumably owning extensive lands. The governors of large provinces, the *hšdrn* or *shahryārān*, were the equivalent of small kings, while the majority of the nobility were small landowners, the *azatān*, or *liberi* of Latin sources, who brought foot soldiers with them from their lands when called to support the king in war.

Much has been made of a senate or council of Parthian nobles and priests who supposedly elected the king from the Arsacid family in the last two centuries of Parthian rule. Wolski has shown that this is a mistaken assumption on the part of Greek and Latin authors. Rather, the nomination of the ruler at times in the last two centuries of Parthian rule followed a long existing institution and should not be attributed to a new institution, a senate which arose as a result of the weakness of the rulers and competing claims of various princes to the throne.<sup>62</sup> The privileges and the ranks of the aristocracy were strictly arranged, but no *notitia dignitatum* has survived, except in Armenian, for the later Arsacid court of that land.<sup>63</sup> It is quite possible that lists of military as well as civil positions existed for various provinces or lands in the Parthian kingdom with coats of arms for each dignity, as in the case of the late Roman Empire.<sup>64</sup> We cannot reconstruct the order of ranks in the Parthian court from the titles found in inscriptions, usually in the frontier areas such as Dura Europos or Hatra, but several of the positions mentioned in the inscriptions may throw some light on the Parthian nobility. We find a general word *hwirw* 'lord' possibly used as a general term of address for a member of the nobility. Those who were at court as friends and even bodyguards of the king probably had special designations such as *nhrwdr*, the *noladarses* of Ammianus (14, 3), the 'first' or 'top friends' of the ruler.<sup>65</sup> These seem to have comprised a small top class of nobility, rather than the word being either a civil or military title. Civil and military titles, usually held by the nobility, will be mentioned below.

In Armenia later the peasants seem to have been distinguished from the town *plebes*, and one may presume similar conditions in Parthian territories, but it is questionable whether the lower classes were subdivided into any kind of semi-legal ranks similar to the nobility.<sup>66</sup> In cities, especially those which continued their Hellenistic status of a

<sup>62</sup> J. Wolski, "Remarques critiques sur les institutions des Arsacides," *Eos*, 46 (Wrocław, 1954), 60, and K. H. Ziegler, *Die Bezirklungen zurischen Rom und dem Partherreich* (Wiesbaden, 1964), 16.

<sup>63</sup> M.-L. Chaumont, "L'ordre de présences à la cour des Arsacides d'Arménie," *J.A.*, 254 (1966), 471-97. Undoubtedly one could interpolate from this list to a similar one in Iran under the Parthians, called a *ghahrdānk* or 'book of ranks,' but details are lacking.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. O. Seeck, ed., *Notitia Dignitatum* (Frankfurt/M., 1962, reprint of 1876 original), XXII for coats of arms, and 77-80 for the *dux Mesopotamiae*.  
<sup>65</sup> Discussed with references by Harnack *opud* Altheim, *op. cit.*, [ch. 6, n. 49], 537-40. Note that

Benveniste, [ch. 5, n. 74], 20, emphasizes the correspondence between Parthian *hwirw* and Greek *κύριος*. The group of 'friends' of the Hellenistic kings undoubtedly was paralleled in Parthian times. On the early predecessors of the 'friends' see G. Widengren, *Der Feudalismus, im alten Iran* (Köln/Opladen, 1969), 38-43.  
<sup>66</sup> Perikhanian, *op. cit.*, [n. 56], 13, where the *šinakkānk* 'peasants' are distinguished from the *rānnik* 'plebes', but Widengren, *Der Feudalismus*, 123, and his "Die Begriffe *populorum ordo* und 'rann': *Festschrift Walter Baetjer* (Weimar, 1966), 384-87, claims that the *rann* were peasants on royal domains and thus in a separate class, but his further assertion (p. 387) that they possessed horses and followed the entourage of nobles is most question-

*polis*, differentiation according to professions did exist, but it does not seem to have been a social class division as among the nobility. When we turn to slaves and servants, the sources are silent, but some inferences can be made from words found in inscriptions, or in Armenian and later Middle Persian texts. The Armenian word *ansāhrak* which seems to be Parthian in form, originally meant a foreigner, probably taken in warfare, and it may have preserved this meaning throughout the Parthian period, for in the Sasanian period it probably fell together with the common word for any slave, *bandag*.<sup>67</sup> The legal position of slaves varied in different areas, for the Parthians did not institute a uniform system wherever they ruled but allowed local differences to exist. The word *paršātar* (MP *parštar*), meaning a maid-servant, in the Parthian period referred to a hierodule, dedicated to service in a temple, but the extent of such 'slavery' is unknown either geographically or numerically.<sup>68</sup> The *vēšāk* or 'house slave' was universal but unfortunately nothing is known about them. The vineyard ostraca from Nisa and parchments from Avroman tell us nothing about the status of slaves or serfs in the *dashtir*, the estates or patrimonies of the nobility.<sup>69</sup> Slavery was widespread, especially in Babylonia, and while we hear of manumissions which made slaves free (*azat*), the number of slaves was always large.

The organization of the provinces was perhaps even more complicated than under the Seleucids and Achaemenids. The size of the satrapy had declined, but not so far as in the Sasanian period, when a satrapy was only a town with surrounding villages and lands.<sup>70</sup> The Parthians on the whole left the local lords and local administration intact when they conquered lands. In their homeland, however, the Parthian kings and nobility owned much land, as we see from the ostraca of Nisa, and royal estates must have been large here. Whether Parthia had a special position, free from taxes as Fars was at the beginning under the Achaemenids, is unknown but unlikely. Likewise, along the road from Khurasan through Rhages and Hamadan, i.e. Media, down to Seleucia, where Seleucid control had been centered, we may presume that

able. His elaboration of the concept *rann*, as the corps of mounted peasants, is unconvincing in "Recherches sur le féodalisme iranien," OS, 5 (1956), 99.

<sup>67</sup> Cf. A. G. Perikhanian, "K voprosu o rabovladieni i zemlevladieni v Irane partyskogo vremeni," *V.D.I.*, no. 1 (1952), 13-27. On Armenia see S. T. Eremyan, "O rabstve i rabovladieni v drevnei Armenii," *V.D.I.*, no. 1 (1950), 12-26. The use of the word *bandak* and *bandakif* 'slavery' in Parthian could also mean something like 'submission' to a king or a lord. Usage changed over the centuries.

<sup>68</sup> See A. Perikhanian, *Sasaniidki Sudebnik* (Erevan, 1973), 534-35, with further references. There were many kinds of dedications of slaves to temples, and this kind of slavery, of course, was not ordinary slavery. Cf. P. Koschaker, *Über einige griechische Rechtsurkunden aus den südlichen Rand gebieten des Hellenismus*, Abh. der Sachsischen A.W., 42 (Leipzig, 1931), 76.

<sup>69</sup> Much has been written about the different

meanings of *dashtir*. For a summary of meanings and references to previous articles, see Perikhanian, *op. cit.*, [n. 68], 458-60, where the religious factor of *dashtir* as a 'trust' or as a 'creation' is discussed. The Semitic mask for the Parthian word is *BN'* (comp. Aramaic *BNH*) which implies the property of inheritance. See also G. Kh. Sarkisian, "O dvukh značemykh terminakh *dashtir* v rannyykh Armyanskikh istochnikakh," in *Ellenisticheskii Blizhni Vostok, Vyznitiya i Iran*, Festschrift for N. Pigulevskaya (Moscow, 1962), 97-101, with much the same double meaning for the term in Armenia as in Iran.

<sup>70</sup> It is clear that the *hšpr* or PHT' of the Nisa ostraca, like the *dyzpry* or 'commandant of a fortress' were not titles of great officials or nobles. See I. M. Dyakonov and V. A. Livshits, *Parthian Economic Documents from Nisa*, 1 (London, 1980), *passim*. The fact that Classical sources continue to use the word 'satrap' for governors and also for almost any official, seems to indicate a generalization of the term.

the Parthian king took over the role of the Seleucid ruler and appropriated the Seleucid crown lands for his own, so Media was probably ruled like Parthia. We are told that the Parthian Empire consists of eighteen kingdoms, according to Pliny (VI, 112), eleven of which are 'upper' and seven of which are 'lower', here meaning those on the plateau and seven in the plains of the 'Fertile Crescent.' On the plateau, other than Parthia and Media, there were probably several kingdoms subject to the Parthians in Armenia, Hyrcania, Azerbaijan (Media Atropatene), and possibly one in the mountains of Tabaristan. In the south we know of the kingdoms of Persis and Elymais, but Kerman may have been another independent area, with Seisian at some times under Parthian rule and in other periods independent or subject to rulers in India. Although eleven 'kingdoms' on the plateau cannot be identified, it is possible that Pliny is reporting accurate information. In the lowlands we know of the kingdom of Characene in the land called Mesene (Aramaic: Mašān) at the mouth of the Persian Gulf. North of Mesene was the central part of the land between the two rivers, ancient Babylonia, but called Beth Aramāye literally 'house of the Aramaeans' in Aramaic or Syriac and Asūristān in Parthian. This rich province, like Parthia and Media, was governed directly by the Parthian kings who maintained their winter residence on the plains, while in the summer they moved to the plateau. The great city of Seleucia had maintained a special status until Vologeses I built a competing city Volgesia to oust it, which will be mentioned below. The area to the northeast of Seleucia, including the Diyala River basin and present Sulaimania, was called Beth Garmai in Syriac, Garmikān in Middle Persian, and the capital was Karkha de Beth Slōk (in Syriac) modern Kirkuk.<sup>71</sup> This kingdom existed down to the coming of the Sasanians, when it was joined either to the central province of Asūristān or to the kingdom of Adiabene to the north.

Adiabene, or Hadhyab in Syriac and in Parthian, called Nodshirakan by the Sasanians, from which Armenian Norshirakan is derived, was the land between the Greater and Lesser Zab Rivers with Arbela as its capital.<sup>72</sup> Little is known about Adiabene in Parthian times except the conversion of a queen of the country and her son Izates to Judaism, and later Izates was rewarded by Artabanus III for supporting his claim to the Arsacid throne by the grant of some land to the northwest, including Nisibis, to Adiabene.<sup>73</sup> In this extension of the domain of Adiabene, to the west and

<sup>71</sup> The Middle Persian form was reconstructed by Marquart, *op. cit.* (ch. 3, n. 37), 21, and is probably the *gihykn*, as well as the form *gihykn* in the Parkuli inscription of Narsch, and on a seal of the British Museum, cf. W. B. Henning, "Notes on the Inscription of Sapat," in the *Professor Jackson Memorial Volume* (Bombay, 1954), 50. In addition to the sources given by Marquart see J. F. Fiey, *Assyrie Chrétienne*, 3 (Beirut, 1968), 11-145. Kirkuk probably was founded by Seleucus, the people, called Garamanoi, are noted by Ptolemy (I, 12.5 and VI, 1.2).

<sup>72</sup> In an inscription from Hatra, the name is written *ntwn šry*, which J. T. Milik in "A propos d'un atelier monétaire d'Adiabène," *RN*, 3 (1961), 51-82, has identified as Natunia, plus *farō-kertia* as

'city made by the Natunians,' and later abbreviated to Shahgird a site on the route from Baghdad to Mosul. This seems correct although the location of the town near Kirkuk, thus strictly not in Adiabene, is curious. The later deformation of the name in MP, using the name Ardashir, founder of the Sasanian dynasty, into Nōd Ardashir(akan) is a case of folk etymology' becoming official. Henning, "Mitteliranisch," (ch. 6, n. 57), 45.

<sup>73</sup> On this see J. Neuser, "The Conversion of Adiabene to Judaism," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, 83 (1964), 60-63, and his "Shorter Note," in *Numeri*, 13 (1966), 144-50. On the historical geography of this area in the Parthian and Sasanian period see L. Dillmann, *Haute Mésopotamie orientale et pays adjacents* (Paris, 1962), esp. 105-29.

northwest, that land, called Beth Nuhadra in Syriac, with its center in the plain of ancient Nineveh, capital of Assyria, was absorbed. Neither under the Parthians nor under the Sasanians does this area of Beth Nuhadra, on the frontier of the Roman Empire, seem to have had a local dynasty; rather it was a military province governed by a *Nohadra* presumably a confidant of the king given a military command. In the flat land to the west of it was the desert and the province called Beth Ar(a)bye in Syriac (in Middle Persian Arbayasān and in Armenian, Arvastan) the chief town of which changed; at one time it was Nisibis. But at the end of the Parthian period, the kingdom and city of Hatra embraced the term Ar(a)bye. Hatra only expanded in the last century of Parthian rule and fell to the Sasanians in the last year of Ardashir's reign.

Since the frontier fluctuated between the Romans and Parthians, the history of the rise and fall of minor principalities or the complicated changes in their boundaries cannot be followed. Other areas which in the Seleucid period were either provinces or separate principalities, and which may have preserved some independence into the Parthian period, were Sophene (Armenian *Cop'k*), Zabdicene (Syriac: Beth Zabdai; Armenian: Zaudēk'), Gorducene (Syriac: Beth Qardu; Armenian: Korduk') and others located in the mountain valleys to the north of Mesopotamia.<sup>74</sup> Since they were not integrated into the Parthian Empire but were usually under Armenian rule, or independent, they need not be further considered since they have little relation to the history of Iran except in the wars with Rome. Obviously there were many changes not only in the administration of various provinces and principalities. The revision of boundaries is difficult to follow, also on account of the changing fortunes of war in the land between the two rivers.

As noted, the satraps were no longer the governors of huge lands such as Babylonia in the Achaemenid period, and we may assume that the subdivisions of the former large territories were not governed by officials called satraps, but the governors of large provinces, in continuation of the Seleucid tradition, were called *stratēgos* in Greek. In Parthian the equivalent term was probably *hštrdy* or *shštrdr*, with a general meaning of 'holder of the realm' or 'sovereign.' Under the governors were satraps, as we see from the Nisa ostraca. There were many officials under the satrap, especially accountants to care for the revenues, *hmrtr*, the *hamarkar*. The chief collector of taxes was an important official called *hrkpy*, or *'rkpy* and *hrqwt* in Parthian, an office formerly mistakenly interpreted as *argbed* or 'fortress commander.'<sup>75</sup> For the Parthian period we have no information about the position of the chief tax collector in the hierarchy, but presumably it was not high and only under the Sasanians does the office gain in importance.

<sup>74</sup> Names of Seleucid provinces, however, do not tell us whether local princes ruled in them or Seleucid governors. The area about Nisibis was called Mygdonia, after the river, by the Greeks but does not seem to have been an independent principality, and the same is true of Apolloniatis on the Diyala River, nearby Sittacene, and others. Information on native names and changes in administration is extremely sparse.

<sup>75</sup> Much has been written about the *argbed*; cf. my remarks *opud* C. B. Welles, *The Parthians and Papyri, The Excavations at Dura-Europos* (New Haven, 1969), 111-12, to be corrected and superseded by the above; also Semeteriy, *op. cit.* (ch. 4, n. 63), 366-75.

When we turn to the army, our sources are also deficient, and the temptation to turn to earlier Achaemenid or later Sasanian times to reconstruct the Parthian army should be resisted, for the Achaemenid organization broke down with the ever greater use of mercenaries, also a feature of the Seleucid kingdom. We may assume, however, that some sort of decimal organization of the army continued under the Parthians, and that there was an army commander, *spāhpyr* or *spāhbad*, especially in time of war, and that the cavalry, the *šp'ry*, was especially important, as we know from Classical sources. In the frontier areas, such as Nisa, we find the military titles of *mrtzwn* 'margrave' and *dzyzpyr* 'fortress commander', the former probably the officer in charge of the frontier troops, while the latter was the officer in charge of a fort, as the name says.<sup>76</sup> From Classical sources we learn that the cavalry tactics of attacking and then feigning retreat, with the famous arrow shot, the 'Parthian shot', turning in the saddle while fleeing, made a great impression on the Romans. When Justin (XLI, 2) says that fifty thousand cavalry opposed Marc Antony, of which only four hundred of them were free men (*liberi*), he means that the nobles only numbered so many. Although it may have seemed to outsiders that the common soldiers were like slaves, they were more like followers or even serfs of the nobility. The feudal nature of Parthian society must have evolved throughout the course of history, but there is no evidence of the peculiarly Western European form of vassalage, and all that went with it. The Parthian form of 'feudalism' seems simpler, with the followers, or the peasants in villages belonging to a lord, supplying troops when needed. Sources for further speculation are lacking.

A loan document from Dura-Europos may throw some light on Parthian political and military provincial organization. It gives the titles and honorifics of two officials, one military and one civil, but it must be remembered that Dura was located on the frontier, even though the document itself is not directly from the frontier area. A certain Phraates, a eunuch, and *hargbad* or 'tax collector', and 'one of the people' (at the court of, or in the entourage of) Manesus, son of another Phraates, who was governor of Mesopotamia. Parapotamia as well as *Arabarkhos*, or 'ruler of the Arabs', made a loan to another person. One of the witnesses was Metolbaessa, commander of the local garrison. The governor held not only the civil office, but had another title which is damaged in the parchment, which was restored as one who receives taxes, but this is uncertain.<sup>77</sup> In any case, both the commander of the garrison and the governor carry honorifics, the former belonging to the (order of the) 'first and chiefly-honored friends and bodyguards' (presumably of the king), while the governor belonged to

the (order of the) *bartza* and the *azarian* or nobility.<sup>78</sup> Just what *bartza* means is uncertain, but I would like to suggest that it does not mean the title *byr'hs* (*bidakhs*) ( *prdkshay* ) 'having rights by authority', a civil honorary order of nobility.<sup>79</sup> The *bidakhs* is more military in character than civil. Much has been written about this title found in many sources, and no matter what the etymology, the historical importance of this title in Parthian times was not that of a 'second king', or second in line of succession, but rather the representative of the king, and since we find the title mostly used on the western and northern frontiers of the Parthian domains, we may conjecture that this official was originally the king's representative at the courts of the sub-kings or 'vassal' rulers. From later usage in Armenia and Georgia the term may have already developed in Parthian times to a meaning of 'warden of the marches,' or something similar to the *mrtzwn* (*marzban*), although the functions of both offices were undoubtedly more than simply military commands.<sup>80</sup> It is virtually impossible to distinguish official designations from popular usage or synonyms in nomenclature, as we have seen with the Parthian words for 'prince,' 'lord,' and others. A word such as *pntr* (*frnatar*) 'commander,' which was civil, however, rather than military, gives no clue to his functions, but we may conjecture it was the equivalent of modern Persian-Arabic *ra'is*, or 'director' of any civilian institution. As noted, the values or meanings of titles changed over centuries, and what may have existed in early Parthian times frequently was either a memory or altered in significance by the time of the Sasanians. Certain constants can be recognized, however, and one may postulate the continuous existence of a village chief under the Parthians as the basic office of authority.<sup>81</sup> Above the village chief was a district or provincial chief of the *rwdsy'srg* (NP *rosta*) who was called a 'satrap' (*štrp* or *PHT* ), while above the satrap was the ruler of the *štr*, the *šahrdar*, the local potentate, corresponding to the Achaemenid satrap and the Sasanian *ostandar* or head of a large province.<sup>82</sup> When we come to the Sasanian period more sources aid us, but for the Parthians these three divisions in the hierarchy of civil jurisdiction were the most widespread, although, as usual, exceptions probably did occur under the Parthians as at other times.

<sup>76</sup> Cf. Welles, *op. cit.* [n. 75], 115-16. My remarks in "Some early Iranian titles," *Oriens*, 15 (1962), 352-54, are still valid regarding parallels and honorifics as well as offices in spite of attacks by F. Altheim/R. Stiehl, *Die Araber in der alten Welt*, I (1964-69), 635-38, or Semerényi, *op. cit.* [ch. 4, n. 63], 371. They mistakenly assumed parallels to mean identities or synonyms, whereas one, Metolbaessa, holds a military office, while the other, Manesus, is a civil official.

<sup>77</sup> The Parthian form would be \**pntr'štr*, which the Arabs settled around Dura might have pronounced \**badta*. The Greek form implies a foreign word, and the uninflected plural would indicate an (honorary) title rather than an office, although it might mean 'district officer,' on which see *infa* n. 82.

<sup>80</sup> Likewise the *plykwsgrn* or 'guardian of the side' (see n. 76) may have been a synonym for *marzban*, but in Parthian times we have no sources, and a reading backwards from the Sasanian period may be misleading.

<sup>81</sup> The Parthian word for 'village' is found only in the Aramaic logogram QRYT' in the Nisa ostraca, which has been interpreted as \**dryz* (+ *ply*) lit. 'lord of the citadel' (*dizabd*), but it may have been rather \**rwdsyry* or \**rwdsd* 'village chief,' even though every village may have had a wall around it like a citadel.

<sup>82</sup> In some areas the chief of a district may have held the title *pntr's* (*padakhs*), as Mar Qardaq who was the *padakhs* of the district of Athur (Assyria) in Sasanian times; cf. P. Beclun, *Acta Marrynn et Saiterinn*, 2 (Leipzig, 1890), 445, line 2. Of this word could be only a general designation of one in authority.

<sup>76</sup> For the titles and bibliography, see the glossary of P. Gignoux, *Glossaire des Inscriptions Pehlives et Parthes* (London, 1972). The title *plykwsgrn* 'paragosgrn' or 'padhosgrn' is uncertain, for in Sasanian times it seems to have meant a 'governor-general' of a number of provinces, or the officer in charge of the armies of one of the four quarters or frontiers of the empire. In Parthian times it may have meant the same as 'governor,' or more likely the same as *marzban*, 'warden of the marches,' but we cannot determine the jurisdiction of the official.

<sup>77</sup> M. I. Rostovtzeff and C. B. Welles, "A Parchment Contract of Loan from Dura-Europos on the Euphrates," *Yale Classical Studies*, 2 (New Haven, 1931), 51. The restored title *pntr'štr* gathers for one's self, has not been found elsewhere. If the word is not Greek, it might be a parallel to *stratagos*, like *PHT*, but I have no suggestion which would fill the gap in the parchment. Cf. H. Bengtson, *Die Strategie in der Hellenist.* Zeit II<sup>2</sup> (1964), 279-280: *trapatārov* (Enns-Im and Mlaker).

The local potentates were on the whole Parthian princes, especially after Mithradates II when members of the Arsacid family were installed as local rulers in many areas.<sup>83</sup> The great families and rulers of the Parthians were traditionally seven, the two most prominent of which were the Suren, who maintained estates in Seistan and elsewhere in Iran, and the Karen family primarily in western Media with a center in Nihavend.<sup>84</sup> The other great families are not mentioned in any source of the Parthian period but notices from Sasanian times may be referred to the early dynasty. One family probably held the office of army commander of the Parthian forces for several generations, such that it became known by the title *šp špny* (Aspabad), and their chief seat apparently was in Khurasan and Gutrgan. The later Sasanian families may have existed in Parthian times, or they may have new names; we do not know. One family, the Mithrān, reputedly had its center at Rayy, but another name Spandiyād is also connected with Rayy, while still another Varzē seems to be a new noble family coming to the fore in Sasanian times. We may postulate the existence of several, perhaps seven according to tradition, high noble families of the Parthians, but we have no information about them.<sup>85</sup> Undoubtedly there were protocols and a hierarchy of rank among families at the court of the Parthian Arsacids, as we find in Armenia, but again the details elude us, although, as noted, Tacitus (*Annals*, VI, 42) says that the right of crowning the Arsacid king was a prerogative of a member of the Suren family, and there were surely other similar protocols.<sup>86</sup> The king as the chief of the nobles had the right of assignment of offices or fiefs, provided that traditions were maintained. To return to the question of a senate of Parthian nobles who had the right to banish or elect kings (Justin XII, 4) (or as Strabo [XI, 515] says there were two assemblies, one composed of relatives of the king [the nobility] and the other of Magi and wise men), undoubtedly the great families had much influence in such meetings, but if one or two assemblies existed, they were related to the tribal traditions of the Parthians rather than to well-established governmental institutions.<sup>87</sup> The feudal relations between sovereign and nobles can only be inferred from later practices, but we may suppose the existence of small courts copying the royal court, coats of arms, and such accoutrements of what we know from Western 'feudalism,' under the Parthians.

Cities seem to have flourished more in the Parthian era of history as compared with the Seleucid or Sasanian periods, probably because of the expanding east-west trade rather than any liberal policy of the Parthian government. Seleucia has been excavated and the continuing Hellenistic institutions and traditions indicate that

<sup>83</sup> See esp. Tacitus, *Annals* (XII, 14 and XV, 2), where various Arsacid princes are mentioned as installed in local kingdoms.

<sup>84</sup> See J. Marquart, "Beiträge zur Geschichte von Iran," *ZDMG*, 49 (1893), 635-36, for references, also Herzfeld, "Sakastān" [ch. 7, n. 28], 64-66, where his derivation of the Karen family from a governor installed by Mithradates I is highly conjectural.

<sup>85</sup> It is unclear whether the chief of a great family would have been called a *\*nāqapār* in Parthian whence Armenian *nahapet*, 'chief of a

clan.' In Manichaean MP we find *zndbyd'* 'head of a *zantiu* or tribe,' which may have replaced an earlier title of *\*nāqapār*. On the Latin term *nigastianes* see the discussion in T. Mommsen *Römische Geschichte*, 5 (Berlin, 1885), 343, n. 2.

<sup>86</sup> On Armenia see Chaumont, *op. cit.*, [n. 63], 471-97. This *gāh nāmāh*, or *noitiā dignitatum*, is from a later period but is derived from Parthian practices.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. G. Widengren, *op. cit.*, [n. 65], 108-115, with further references.

Parthian rule brought little change from Seleucid times. The example of the great metropolis in the lowlands may have been unique, however, since the sources on other towns are few and tell us little. The Parthians seem to have neglected the lowlands, or at least southern Babylonia, during the pre-Christian period, since archaeological surveys show a neglect of agricultural land there.<sup>88</sup> Compared to the Sasanian period, when land under cultivation and irrigation greatly increased while urban life did not, for the Parthians, at least in Mesopotamia, the reverse seems to have obtained. After the death of Mithradates II internecine struggles between Arsacid contenders for the throne were not conducive to the flourishing of cities. Pliny (VI, 122) says that in his time the city of Seleucia on the Tigris was free (*libera*) and retained its 'Macedonian' manners. Seleucia, as undoubtedly other cities too, revolted against Parthian control from time to time, but the sharply delineated preferences of the Hellenic 'aristocracy' as opposed to the native 'masses' have been perhaps too much emphasized by modern scholars.<sup>89</sup> Seleucia supported Gotarzes against his brother Vardanes, resisting the siege of the latter for seven years after A.D. 36, according to Tacitus (XI, 9). Although one can distinguish between three groups — the Parthians, Greeks and natives — to consider the inner conflicts of the three as the key to urban revolts may be too simplistic a surmise. Numismatic evidence suggests that the city after A.D. 24 ceased to issue its own local bronze coinage. The old Seleucid organization was maintained there and, on the whole, in other *polis*' cities, if one is to judge by the Greek letter of Artabanus III to the city of Susa; for a city council and various magistrates governed the city undoubtedly continuing the old organizations, although the influence of Parthian royal officials on the city must have been great.<sup>90</sup> Cresiphon, a suburb of Seleucia, across the Tigris River on the east bank, was the residence of the Parthian kings, according to Strabo (XVI, 743), although Pliny (VI, 122) claims the city was founded to draw the population away from Seleucia, an echo of the founding of Seleucia itself vis-à-vis Babylon. Another city, Vologesoecerta, was founded by King Vologeses nearby, according to Pliny, although which king this was is uncertain. Likewise the location of this city and its identification with the Vologesiās of Ptolemy, Ammianus, and others, is in dispute.<sup>91</sup> The Parthian kings,

<sup>88</sup> R. M. Adams and H. J. Nissen, *The Uruk Countryside: the Natural Setting of Urban Societies* (Chicago, 1972), 57, and H. Nissen "Sudbabylonien in parthischer und sassanidischer Zeit," *Baghdader Mitteilungen*, 6 (1973), 82.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. C. C. Hopkins, ed., *Topography and Architecture of Seleucia on the Tigris* (Ann Arbor, 1972), 160, where the dichotomy of natives supporting rebels and Greek commercial oligarchy favoring the Parthians, or the Romans if powerful, is maintained. Cf. McDowell, *Coins op. cit.*, [n. 27], 226-27. It is possible that after the revolt masses of non-Greeks settled in the city, as suggested by G. A. Koshelenko, "Arkhitektura zhilishch Grecheskikh gorodov Parfi," in *Antichinyi Gorod* (Moscow, 1963), 181. Tacitus (*Annals*, VI, 42) mentions the senate of Seleucia and the conflict between the aristocracy and the common folk of the city.

<sup>90</sup> F. Cumont, "Une lettre du roi Artaban III," *CRAI* (1932), 238-60, and Welles, *Royal Correspondence*, [ch. 6, n. 68], no. 75. For a discussion of the roles of the *archons*, the *epistates* and *satrap*, see G. A. Koshelenko, "Gorodskoi stroi politso zapadnoi Parfi," *VDI*, 4 (1960), 79-80. Echarata continued as a summer capital of the Parthians, according to Strabo (XI, 522).

<sup>91</sup> A. Maricq, "Vologesiās, Iemporium de Cresiphon," *Syria*, 36 (1959), 271, maintained the identity of the two, situated on the 'Royal Canal' between the Tigris and Euphrates, while N.-L. Chaumont, "Études d'histoire Parthe III. Les villes fondées par les Vologèses," *Syria*, 51 (1974), 81, places Vologesiā near later Kuā and Vologesoecerta on the canal.

however, were not founders of numerous cities as were the Sasanians, and the cities which flourished on the trade routes such as the capital of Characene, Hatra and Palmyra did so because of Roman demand for eastern spices and luxuries rather than from Parthian support of them. They also flourished because of their relative independence from the two great powers.

Whereas the history of the trading cities or 'caravan' cities has been treated as a continuation of Hellenism by modern authors, the political ideology of the Parthians, on the other hand, developed independently of the cities. Since the Parthians came from the steppes of Central Asia, we may assume that they had only oral traditions and no written history. Likewise the inhabitants of the province of Parthia which they conquered, unlike the Persians of Fars province, probably had few significant traditions or memories of the Achaemenids. There is no evidence that the early Parthians paid much attention to any political ideology, other than those of the ancient Iranian or even Indo-Aryan or Indo-European tribes. With their conquest of settled Iranians and of descendants of the Greeks and Macedonians of the Seleucid Empire, two traditions were added to their own. The Greek or Seleucid tradition was accepted by the Parthian rulers, as we can see from the title '*philhellene*' on the coins of most of the rulers from the beginning to the end of the Arsacids. From the coins, at least, there is no evidence of an anti-Hellenic sentiment, and there was little reason for this among the Parthians. The old Iranian or Achaemenid tradition is more difficult to grasp, since evidence for the promotion of dynastic links with the past, great dynasty is scanty. The Parthians, of course, fought against the Seleucids, but the treatment of Demetrius II by Mithradates I indicates that the Parthians were not simply partisans of Iran versus the enemy, Greece. As at Commagene, the Parthians may well have created a mixed Persian-Greek fictitious genealogy, as Wolski suggests, but this is only surmise.<sup>92</sup> Arrian (*Parthika*, fig. 1 in Syncellus) says that the Arsacid family was descended from the Achaemenid Artaxerxes, probably the second of the line, whose name before becoming ruler was Arsaces. From the title 'king of kings' on coins of Mithradates II and from indications in Tacitus (*Annals*, VI, 31) and others, the belief that they were the heirs of past Persian glory and empire was probably promulgated by the Arsacids after the first century B.C.<sup>93</sup>

Perhaps too much has been made of the reappearance of the title 'king of kings' and the appearance of Aramaic letters on the coins of Vologeses I to support the hypothesis that the Parthians adopted an anti-Greek attitude by the first century of our era, with a corresponding exaltation of Achaemenid traditions.<sup>94</sup> The use of Aramaic at Nisa instead of Greek is no real evidence for anti-Greek feeling, for from Avroman in Kurdistan documents in both Greek and Aramaic were found and obviously in some areas Greek was more used than Aramaic, or vice versa in other places. The Aramaic

<sup>92</sup> J. Wolski, "L'ideologie monarchique chez les Parthes," in *Studi vari di Storia greca, ellenistica e romana* (Milan, 1977), 233, and his "Les Achéménides et les Arsacides," *Syria*, 43 (1966), 74-77.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. J. Neuser, "Parthian Political Ideology," *IA*, 3 (1963), 56-58, and Wolski, "Les Achéménides" [n. 92], 87, and his "Arsakiden und Sasaniden," in *Beiträge zur alten Geschichte und deren*

*Nachleben*, ed. by R. Stiehl, 1 (Berlin, 1969), 321. See also F. Altheim, *Literatur und Geschichtsbild im ausgehenden Altertum*, 1 (Halle, 1948), 83.

<sup>94</sup> Especially by Wolski in "Les Parthes et leur attitude envers le monde Gréco-Romain," *Dialoques d'histoire ancienne*, 2 (Besançon, 1976), 284-85. Contrary to Wolski, Greek legends do not disappear from Parthian coins although they

legends on Parthian coins have been misunderstood. They are not legends, for those are in Greek, albeit debased, to the end of the dynasty. The Aramaic letters are rather mint, or mint masters' marks, and names appear on coins in Aramaic only in the last century of Parthian rule, which should be attributed to the decline of knowledge of Greek rather than a conscious anti-Greek policy on the part of the Arsacid rulers. The question of the use of Aramaic, however, has many ramifications.

Under the Seleucids Greek was the official language and script of the state. Parallel to it went Aramaic, which continued to be used as the principal means of written communication in areas away from the main road from Mesopotamia to Bactria. Thus in Parthia, Persis, Azertajjan, Central Asia and the Caspian districts, Aramaic continued to be used with little or no inroads by Greek. As time continued the usages of Persis varied more and more from those of Sogdiana and elsewhere. Local scribes began not only to use more Iranian words in their texts but also to introduce local grammatical features. All the time the texts were read aloud in the local language by the scribe, whose duty was to write messages for government officials, the local ruler or for anyone who paid him to write for them. The ostraca from Nisa, dating into the first century A.D., can be read as Aramaic with Iranian words and even endings, or they may be read as Parthian, written in ideograms or logograms, but read aloud in Parthian alone. For the inhabitants of Nisa were Parthians who spoke Parthian and obviously did not speak Aramaic, not even a broken form of it. In Persis the Aramaic legends on coins were read aloud as Persian, in Georgia and Armenia, similar inscriptions were read aloud in the local language. The fully developed Parthian system of writing, however, which may be characterized as an Iranian text with Aramaic ideograms in it, as contrasted with the earlier Parthian writing in Aramaic with Iranian words and some endings, is only attested from the third century A.D., the end of Parthian rule. The second century is blank, for we have no Iranian inscriptions from this period. We do have Semitic inscriptions from this period, however, in Hatra, Palmyra, and even from Characene and Elymais, but none from Iran. One may conjecture either a gradual change from the first to the third century A.D., or possibly a conscious effort to reform the writing at some date during this period. The separate development of local scripts in Mesopotamia, in Georgia, Khwarazm and Sogdiana is part of the overall decline of the use of Greek and the relative isolation of the peripheral areas of the Iranian plateau. More evidence for these local developments can be found in the Sasanian period when both religions and scripts proliferate, giving more material for a reconstruction of the history of both scripts and languages. In any case, there is no evidence for either an anti-Greek language/script or an anti-Aramaic language/script movement; rather time took its course in both cases.

The view of religion under the Parthians is filled with contradictions; for again we

become debased, while his further remark that the first Arsacids borrowed the model, even the idea of the coinage from Persis is unconvincing. The Aramaic letters KN, which appear on the reverses of several rare Susa 'type' coins of Seleucus I, and the coins with legend WHSW/R are enigmatic but they do not change the general picture of Seleucid and Parthian coinage in which Greek legends are the

norm. The change in the chancellery of Nisa in the middle of the first century B.C. is revealed in the smaller, more legible style of writing on the ostraca, as well as the mention of scribes, according to I. M. Dyakonov and V. A. Livshits, *Dokumenty iz Nisy* (Moscow, 1960), 17, but their significance escapes us.

have no written sources from this period of Iranian history and archaeological evidence is equivocal. From this evidence, theoretically, one may distinguish between Greek cults and influences, local beliefs and cults and Zoroastrianism on the Iranian plateau under the Parthians. In the east, Buddhism and various Hindu cults are attested at various times and in various places, while in Mesopotamia Judaism and various local religions, some of them descendants of ancient Babylonian religions, existed. The farther east and Mesopotamia will be discussed in later chapters, while here the emphasis will be on the religious situation in the heart of the Parthian domains.

Continuing Greek influences, and possibly cults which were Greek in origin, are attested by inscriptions and art remains. Herakles undoubtedly was a popular hero-deity in Iran in Seleucid and Parthian times with some sort of a cult and followers. The Greek inscriptions in a cave at Karafu, about 20 km. west of Takab on the Azerbaijan-Kurdistan border, with the apotropaic message, "here lives Herakles; may no evil enter," from the Seleucid period, plus another on the rock relief of Herakles Kallinikos at Behistun from 149-148 B.C., plus several statues of the hero-god, all attest his popularity in Iran.<sup>95</sup> Throughout the Seleucid and Parthian periods a process of amalgamation or syncretism continued, whereby local deities were identified with Greek deities. Thus in Iran, Herakles probably was early identified with Verethragna, later Bahram, Vahagn in Armenia, and also in Commagene on the royal statues and inscriptions of Antiochus, the local ruler.<sup>96</sup> On coins and in the arts, evidence of the assimilation of Greek and Iranian deities indicates a widespread acceptance of this syncretism, which is not unexpected since both peoples came from the same Indo-European linguistic family. Likewise the fire cult of Iran was matched by a Greek counterpart, and the word *ΕΣΤΙΑΣ* on a rhyton from Nisa could refer to a combined fire cult.<sup>97</sup> In Iran, of course, the fire cult was characteristic of the Zoroastrian religion then as later, and when Isidore of Charax (par. 11) speaks of an ever-burning fire in the city of Asak where the first Arsacid king was crowned, we have the prototype of later Sasanian practice, where in the royal fire temple a fire was started at the beginning of the reign of a new king. Ancestor worship, or rites in honor of the *fravashis* or spirits of one's ancestors, was a feature of the religion of the Parthians, as later in Iran.

Popular beliefs differed from more formal religions, and worship of the elements, as well as the stars and the sun, apparently was widespread.<sup>98</sup> Likewise the

<sup>95</sup> H. von Gall, "Die Kultstätte in den Felsen von Karafu bei Takab," *AMN*, 11 (1978), 94; and for Behistun, L. Robert in *Gronion* (1963), 76. Many terra-cotta figurines from Selucia indicate the popularity of Herakles there; cf. Frye, *supra*, *Heritage*, 176-76, with references.

<sup>96</sup> F. K. Dörner u. T. Goell, *Arsameia am Nymphios*, Istanbul Forschungen, 23 (Berlin, 1963), 223; and for Vahagn see G. D. Bardumyan, "Gosudarstvennye religioznye kultury Armanyan," *Vestnik Mskovskogo Universiteta*, 2 (1976), 87-88. His etymologies must be viewed with skepticism. See also J. M. Unwala, *Observations on the Religion*

of the Parthians (Bombay, 1925), 21-22. On some coins of Mithradates I a standing Herakles appears on the reverse.

<sup>97</sup> G. A. Koshelehenko, "Chrechneskaya nadsip' na Parfyanskom rione," *VDI*, 2 (1967), 167-70. His identification of the Greek deity Hestia with Vesta in Rome and Agni in India is questionable since the Greek Hestia although patroness of the hearth does not seem to have had a special fire cult dedicated to her.

<sup>98</sup> See C. Colpe, "Die Bezeichnung 'iranisch' für die Religion der Partherzeit," *ZDMG*, Supplementband (1969), 1013-14. The popularity of

identification of certain deities with planets or stars existed, but the significance of astrology in popular belief is uncertain, for just what an 'identification' of the sun with Mithra or Venus with Anahita meant is unclear. Anahita in Sogdiana was distinguished from another female deity Nane or Nanaia as also in Armenia, but the relation of these two deities to each other and to the old belief in a mother goddess are both unknown.<sup>99</sup> In any case, syncretism and the identification of deities with each other, with a common cult or set of rituals, was widespread. Whether one cult was more popular or more followed in one place than another, or whether one cult was more patronized by the ruler or aristocracy than another, cannot be determined but is likely. If we try to assemble the notices about the religion of the Parthians, many popular practices are found, such as the remark of Josephus (*Jewish Antiquities*, XVIII, 344) that the Parthians carried small idols with them on voyages, or that trees were worshipped in Mesopotamia in Parthian times.<sup>100</sup> Popular beliefs certainly may be found, but what of an 'official' religion - of Zoroastrianism? Apparently no official state religion existed, as later under the Sasanians, but the Parthians have suffered in later sources as being poor Zoroastrians or even non-Zoroastrians.

Undoubtedly there were Magi who condemned the presence of statues in cult places while others did not object; or some adhered to one set of rituals and others to another.<sup>101</sup> Likewise some indulged in time speculation (Zervanism) while others did not, but again there is no evidence for formal sects or religions under the Parthians. The extension of Iranian cults, especially one of fire with Magi, into Anatolia is mentioned by Strabo (XV, 733) and others, but one may conjecture that this was the legacy of Achaemenid domination. At the end of the Parthian period, however, Zoroastrianism was developing into an organized religion in competition with other religions such as Judaism, Christianity and possibly the one we know as Mandaitism. According to a late Middle Persian text, the *Denkart*, a Parthian king Valaksh (Vologeses) ordered a gathering of all oral texts of the Avesta, and any teachings derived from it, presumably in order to codify the sacred texts of the Zoroastrians, but which king of this name is intended cannot be determined.<sup>102</sup> At least, this is an indication that the Parthians were not indifferent to the Zoroastrian

shamans in this period (p. 1017), however, is nowhere attested, even though not impossible. Buddhism in the eastern part of Parthian domains will be discussed in the next chapter.

<sup>99</sup> On Anahita see H. Lommel, "Anahita-Sarasvati," in *Asiatica*, Festschrift Friedrich Weller (Leipzig, 1934), 405-12, with references. On Sogdiana see N. V. Dyakonova and O. I. Smirnova, "K voprosu o kult'e Nany (Anahity) v Sogde," *VDI*, 1 (1967), 74-81. Isidore of Charax (6) speaks of a temple of Artemis at Concohar (Kangavar), which has been identified with the massive ruins in that town. Anahita also has been identified with Cybele in Asia Minor, and probably elsewhere with other deities. Cf. also M.-L. Chaumont, "Le culte de la déesse Anahita (Anahit) dans la religion des monarques d'Iran et d'Arménie au III<sup>e</sup> siècle de notre ère," *J.A.* 253 (1965), 167-71.

<sup>100</sup> See E. Sachau, trans., *Die Chronik von Atheld*, *Abh. PAW* (Berlin, 1915), 52. The reliability of this Syriac source has been questioned, but it is hardly a modern fabrication.

<sup>101</sup> See J. Bidez and F. Cumont, *Les mages hellénisés*, 1 (Paris, 1938), 74. Every female figure on rock reliefs, silver bowls, or on seals is usually identified as Anahita, but this is too simplistic since not every representation is a goddess, and Anahita was not the sole female deity as even a reading of L. Gray, *The Foundations of the Iranian Religions* (Bombay, 1929), indicates.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. the text of D. M. Madan, 1 (Bombay, 1911), 412.5-10 and trans. by Zaehner, *op. cit.* [ch. 3, n. 40], 8.

religion, and continued to support its development. The names from the Nisa ostraca, such as Sroshdar, Tirdat, Vahuman, and many others are clearly Zoroastrian, but whether the large number of names with Mithra in them, such as Mithram and Mithradat, point to the existence of a separate cult devoted to Mithra, the prototype of Roman Mithraism, cannot be determined.<sup>103</sup> Whether such Zoroastrian texts as the *Vendidad* were composed in Parthian times cannot be determined although not unlikely. In any case, Zoroastrian practices, such as next-of-kin marriages, exposure of the dead, are attested for Parthian times, indicating a continuity from the past and a link to the Sasanians.

At the same time, however, the later tradition that the Arsacids were lax in their religious zeal seems correct, for in this manner the Parthians continued Achaemenid tradition. With the rise of Christianity and other organized religions, however, the Parthians had to combat conversions from Zoroastrianism which probably caused a tightening of the organization and priesthood of Zoroastrianism. Jews, on the whole, were on good terms with the Parthians, especially after the Roman occupation of Palestine.<sup>104</sup> The episode of the two Jewish brothers Anileus and Asineus, as reported by Josephus (*Jewish Antiquities*, XVIII, 9), who created a private army and domain in Babylonia in the time of Artabanus III, indicates the importance of the Jewish settlement there as well as the weakness of the central government.

We have mentioned the disposal of the dead by exposure, but this practice had not become general among the Parthians as in the Sasanian period. In Merv and elsewhere in Central Asia burials in large jars have been found by archaeologists but *astodans* or ossuaries for the bones have also been found.<sup>105</sup> The principle of non-pollution of the soil is maintained in both cases, and different forms and styles of coffins have been found in graves of the Parthian period in Mesopotamia as well as on the plateau. Thus evidence for the Zoroastrian faith of the defunct should not be limited solely to bodies exposed to vultures. Obviously in the pre-Sasanian period there was no prescribed manner for the disposal of the dead, and only the general admonition not to pollute the elements prevailed. The ancient Indo-European practice of cremation which we find among the Greeks and other Indo-European peoples evidently had vanished from the Iranian plateau by this time, since there is no evidence for ashes of the dead in Parthian burials, although it is conceivable that some people followed the Greek practice for one reason or another. In any case, the Zoroastrian abhorrence of polluting the fire already held sway in Parthian times. We now know that much of

<sup>103</sup> I. M. Dyakonov and V. A. Livshits, *Dokumenty iz Nisy* (Moscow, 1960), 24. The curious appearance of the name Sasan apparently as a deity, in the Parthian ostraca from Nisa, in compounds such as Sasanhokht, Sasandrt, indicates a wider pantheon, or even a cult of divinized ancestors, than we know from later times. See V. A. Livshits, "Parfyanskii reonim Sasan," *Primeneniye pamyatniki i problemy istorii kul'tury narodov vostoka*, ed. by P. A. Gryaznevich (Moscow, 1977), 93-97.

<sup>104</sup> See G. Widengren, "Quelques rapports entre juifs et iraniens à l'époque des Parthes," *Vetus Testamentum*, Supplement 4 (Leiden, 1957), 197-240.

<sup>105</sup> G. Koshelenko and O. Orzov, "O pograbskom kulte v Mangiane v Parfyanskoe vremya," *VDI*, 4 (1965), 42-56. In the footnotes further references to ossuaries and other burials may be found. See also Y. A. Rapoport, "Some Aspects of the Evolution of Zoroastrian Funeral Rites," and G. P. Snesarov, "The Mazdeist Tradition in the Burial Customs of the Peoples of Central Asia," in *Trudy XXIV Mezdunarodnogo Kongressa Vostočevovedov*, 3 (Moscow, 1963), 127-40.

the culture and practices of the Sasanians was Parthian in origin and the former have received credit for innovation, when they really were building on the past of their enemies whom they successfully sought to denigrate.

#### WARS WITH ROME

The Classical sources on Parthia naturally deal mostly with the wars between the Romans and Parthians, although some information about internal affairs or dynastic quarrels is recorded. The accounts are, of course, partisan and must be used with care, but at least the general course of the struggles between the two powers and the outcomes of such contests are usually reliable. On the whole, the Romans had the upper hand, especially in the time of the empire when Parthian central authority had been weakened and local rulers had asserted more authority than in the first two centuries of Parthian rule. Phraates III saw the fall of Tigranes II the 'Great' of Armenia and Mithradates of Pontus to superior Roman arms and the generalship of Lucullus, but it was not until Pompey replaced Lucullus that the Romans were able to impose a peace on the area. The Classical sources on the diplomacy and intrigues between Tigranes the younger, son of Tigranes the Great of Armenia, and Phraates have been well summarized by Debevoise, making repetition here unnecessary.<sup>106</sup> Tigranes and Phraates composed their differences after their ambassadors met Pompey in Syria in 64 B.C., and it seems the boundary between the Armenian and Parthian states was drawn between the northern border of Adiabene and Nisibis, while Syria was annexed by Rome. Phraates was murdered in 57 B.C. by his sons Mithradates and Orodēs (*urrud*), and the former apparently seized power only to be ousted by his brother, who after much fighting succeeded in capturing and executing Mithradates in 54 B.C. The following year the new Roman governor of Syria, Crassus, with overweening arrogance, attacked the Parthian domains and lost his life as well as his legions at the battle of Carrhae in May 53 B.C. With one stroke the position of the two antagonists changed, for the well-nigh invincible Romans were stunned by the great losses, and the Parthians became the champions of anti-Roman groups everywhere in the Near East, especially the Jews and some peoples of Anatolia. We are not concerned here with the change in Roman thinking about the east, but about Parthian reaction to the victory. The Parthians, contrary to what one might expect, did not take advantage of the victory, for we hear only about raids into Syria with no thought of immediate conquest. Time was secured for the Romans who proceeded to consolidate their position in the east. It is from this period that the letters of Cicero, appointed governor of Cilicia in 51 B.C., give insights into the changed attitude of the Romans towards the Parthians. The Romans now realized they had a formidable foe, able and willing to challenge Roman domination of the east, although their cavalry tactics belied any intentions to permanently occupy settled areas. The need or desire to make a treaty between the two hostile powers, however, does not seem to have occurred to either side until the Roman civil war brought Pompey to seek an alliance with Orodēs, the Parthian king (Cassius Dio, XLI, 55), but nothing happened since Julius Caesar triumphed over his rival. Caesar made extensive preparations for a war

<sup>106</sup> *Op. cit.* [ch. 7, n. 64], 70-5, and in more detail, Dobinská, *op. cit.* [n. 40], 228-42.

of revenge against the Parthians, but his murder ended such plans.<sup>107</sup> The conflict between the Republicans and Marc Antony and Octavian changed the picture, for Cassius, governor of Syria, took the side of the Republicans and sought support from Orodes (Cassius Dio, XI VIII, 24) and according to several sources Parthians fought against Octavian at the battle of Philippi in 42 B.C.<sup>108</sup> Antony took up the task of mobilizing for an expedition against Parthia, but while he was in Egypt the Parthians invaded Syria under Pacorus, son of Orodes, together with Labienus, the envoy of Cassius who had remained at the Parthian court. After initial successes they divided forces, Labienus moving into Asia Minor and Pacorus south into Palestine. Many local rulers broke with Rome and joined the Parthians and in Jerusalem Antigonos, nephew of Hyrcanus the high priest, was made king by the Parthians while Hyrcanus was carried a prisoner to Parthia.<sup>109</sup> Roman power reached its lowest ebb in the east, but soon the tide turned.

Antony's general P. Ventidius Bassus in 39 B.C. defeated and killed Labienus, who had taken the title *imperator*, and the following year Pacorus too met his death at the hands of the same general.<sup>110</sup> Antony came to Syria to restore Roman authority and in 37 B.C. Jerusalem fell; Antigonos was killed and Herod was put in his place. Elsewhere pro-Parthian rulers were punished, and the Romans regained their former position. It is, of course, unknown whether Orodes had any dream or plan of re-establishing the Achaemenid Empire, but this was the only opportunity given to the Parthians in their history to extend their sway beyond the Euphrates to the Mediterranean Sea. Undoubtedly many of the inhabitants of Syria and Asia Minor welcomed the Parthians, but large numbers, perhaps the majority, wished to remain under Roman protection. In any case, the Parthians failed, and Orodes renounced his throne to his son Phraates IV, who then killed his father and brothers. Some Parthian nobles fled to the Romans, including a prominent general called Monases (*monas*) whom Antony hoped to use as a friendly claimant to the Parthian throne, but Phraates persuaded the deserter to return, and Antony seeing his chances diminished proposed a peace with Phraates, seeking the return of the standards lost by Crassus at Carthae as well as war prisoners. Phraates refused, and Antony made preparations to attack Parthia through Armenia.<sup>111</sup> The war between Antony and Phraates involved Armenia and Median Atropatene, and in this direction the Romans advanced as far as the capital called Phraaspa identified as modern Maragheh.<sup>112</sup> The king of Armenia,

<sup>107</sup> For an extensive survey of the sources on Caesar's preparations see Debevoise, *op. cit.* [ch. 7, n. 64], 106-07. On the relations of this period see Ziegler, *op. cit.* [n. 62], 32-34.

<sup>108</sup> Debevoise, *op. cit.* [ch. 7, n. 64], 108, for sources.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 13. The events of this period are discussed in detail by A. G. Bokhchani, *Parfiya i Rim*, 2 (Moscow, 1966), 90-99. The overthrow of the Hasmonaean house by the Idumaeans in Jerusalem cannot be discussed here.

<sup>110</sup> On the Roman actions see H. Buchheim, "Die Orientpolitik des Triumvirn M. Antonius," *Abh. Heidelberger Akad. der Wiss.*, 3 (1960), 75-77. L. H. Bengtson, "Zum Parthierfeldzug des Anton-

ius" (Sb. Akad. d. Wiss., München, 1974, Heft 1) and "Marcus Antonius, Triumvir v. Herscher d. Orients" (München, 1977), 184 foll. For all of the wars see A. Günther, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der Kriege zwischen Römern und Parthern* (Berlin, 1922), 136 pp. Coins attributed to Pacorus suggest a co-regency with his father.

<sup>111</sup> On the attempts at peace see Ziegler, *op. cit.* [n. 62], 36-44.

<sup>112</sup> V. Mironsky, "Roman and Byzantine Campaigns in Atropatene," *BSOAS*, 11 (1944), 258-61, with references to sources. Perhaps this is a Middle Iranian form \**frāh-dāpa*, but the location is conjecture.

Artavazd, abandoned Antony and the ruler of Azerbaijan, also called Artavazd, who had been quarrelling with Phraates IV, became reconciled with the Parthians against the common foe. The result was a disastrous retreat of the Romans with great losses, but after the departure of Antony, Phraates and Artavazd, king of Azerbaijan, again quarreled, after which Artavazd then sought the support of the Romans. Plans were made for a new invasion of Parthian domains by Antony but instead he only entered Armenia and deposed the king in 34 B.C. and brought him and his family to Alexandria as captives.

Antony entered the eastern game of marriage alliances to strengthen his position, offering his young son Alexander to the daughter of the king of Azerbaijan, after having first considered a marriage into the Armenian royal house. In general he distributed territories to dynasts who would support him, such as Cappadocia to Archelaus and Sophone to Polemo, according to Cassius Dio (XLIX, 32). The internarratives between the minor courts under Roman control paralleled those under Parthian influence, and the picture resembles that of Europe in the nineteenth century, when the royal houses were filled with intermarriages. In 33 B.C. Antony and Artavazd of Azerbaijan defeated the Parthians, allied with Artaxias, the new ruler of Armenia and a son of the deposed king. But after Antony had to withdraw all Roman troops for his war with Octavian, his ally in turn was defeated and fled to the Romans (Cassius Dio, LI, 16). Roman power and influence again sank in areas to the east of the Euphrates River, but so volatile was the power structure in the east that Phraates was not able to take advantage of the Roman civil war between Antony and Octavian. Instead he was faced with a revolt led by a certain Tiridates who struck tetradrachms at Seleucia calling himself both 'friend of the Romans' and 'philhellene'.<sup>113</sup> Even though he may have hoped for Roman aid to maintain his position, the victor at Actium did not support Tiridates, and he had to flee before the forces of Phraates, and took refuge in Syria in 26 B.C. (Cassius Dio, LI, 18). Octavian, now called Augustus, prepared for war, but then peace was made, and the Roman standards lost by Crassus and Antony were returned in 20 B.C. by Phraates, and the Romans celebrated this event by erecting a triumphal arch in Rome.<sup>114</sup>

Roman policy had vacillated between the creation of Roman provinces in the east to the installation or recognition of client kingdoms, but Parthia favored the latter course. Antony's policy of supporting pro-Roman dynasts was followed by Augustus, and he preferred intrigue and rewards and punishments with client dynasts rather than military action to extend Roman frontiers. In Armenia, for example, a pro-Roman party was probably encouraged to ask Augustus for a new king, and the future emperor Tiberius escorted Tigranes, the younger brother of Artaxias, to Armenia with Roman troops to install him on the throne. Fortunately for the Romans, Artaxias was murdered and Tigranes II was accepted by the Armenians and Romans thus averting a civil war. In an inscription at Ankara Augustus says that he made Armenia major into a province but the preferred to hand it over to Tigranes to

<sup>113</sup> Sellwood, *op. cit.* [ch. 7, n. 57], 167-68. See also H. Dessau, *Prosopographia Imperii Romanii* (Berlin, 1897-98), T 175.

<sup>114</sup> References in Debevoise, *op. cit.* [ch. 7, n. 64], 141, n. 58; he stresses the importance of this act for the Romans. On the treaty between the Romans and Parthians see Ziegler, *op. cit.* [n. 62], 45-51.



rule.<sup>115</sup> About the same time the son of Artavazd of Azerbaijan, called Ariobarzanes, succeeded to the throne in that kingdom at the whim of Augustus according to his inscription (para. 27), but in reality Roman influence had little to do with this succession. Archelaus of Cappadocia was a Roman client, and after the settlement of the Armenian succession he, probably because of his cooperation with the Romans, received Armenia Minor, the land around Melitene (Malatya) from Augustus. Archelaus' wife was probably a princess of the Median royal family, an indication of the dynastic connections in this time. Armenia, although in the eyes of Augustus a client state, in reality was to prove a headache for the Romans, since pro-Parthian sentiments were strong, and the Parthians remained as influential as the Romans in influencing Armenian affairs.

Augustus had sent a slave girl called Musa to the Parthian king, who managed to influence Phraates so much that he raised her from concubine to queen, and she secured the right of succession for her young son, born while she was a concubine, and the sending of other sons of Phraates to Rome for education, although the Romans considered them as hostages.<sup>116</sup> The Augustan peace gave a great impetus to merchants, and commerce flourished across the Euphrates, the boundary between the two states. The small trading states, such as Palmyra and Hatra, perhaps profited more than the two central great powers, but prosperity was manifest everywhere. The death of Tigranes II of Armenia some years before 6 B.C. almost interrupted the peace, for the Armenians raised the son of this Tigranes with the same name, and his sister-wife Erato to the throne without the approval, tacit or direct, of the Romans. Augustus, however, accepted the fact, but about 6 B.C. he apparently tried to impose another king on Armenia called Artavazd, possibly a brother of Tigranes III (Tacitus, *Annals*, II, 4). This move failed, since the pretender died, and Tigranes then did send gifts to Augustus to conciliate him (Cassius Dio, LV, 9), and the Romans accepted him. After Tigranes III died fighting 'barbarians' about A.D. 2 (Cassius Dio, LV, 10a), his sister Erato could not hold the throne. If we follow the *Res Gestae* (para. 27), after the death of Tigranes III Augustus gave Armenia to Ariobarzanes, king of Media Atropatene (Azerbaijan), and after his death to his son Artavazd. He continues that when Artavazd was murdered after about two years of rule in A.D. 6 he sent Tigranes IV, a grandson of Herod the Great of Judaea by his son Alexander, to Armenia. Thus we see that the intervention of Augustus into the internal affairs of the small kingdoms of this area respected dynastic ties among them, as it generally ignored the wishes of the people. Augustus seemed to have followed a policy of strengthening the related dynasties, even though he may have thought he was dividing them. At the same time, unsuccessful rulers who fled to Roman protection were well received by Augustus, and in his *Res Gestae* (para. 32) he mentions Artaxares of Adiabene, as well as Artavazd of Media and others, who took refuge as suppliants of the Roman emperor. A similar policy was followed by the Parthians, although we do not have the sources in this regard.

<sup>115</sup> T. Mommsen, *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*

(Berlin, 1883), par. 27. Tirdates II should really be III, but Tirdates the Great is usually called I, so we use II here.

<sup>116</sup> Ziegler, *op. cit.* [n. 62], 52, and Debevoise, *op.*

*cit.* [ch. 7, n. 64], 144, for sources.

Phraates IV died, possibly poisoned, in 2 B.C. and was succeeded by his widow Musa who married her son Phraataces, and issued a joint coinage, the only such example in Parthian history. The Parthians did not support Phraataces, however, and in A.D. 4 he fled to Syria where he vanishes from the scene.<sup>117</sup> He was followed by Orodes III who struck tetradrachms alone and had a very short reign and was assassinated. The Parthian nobles sent envoys to Rome to obtain another son of Phraates IV, who had been sent there, to be their ruler, and Vonones the eldest was sent home in A.D. 8. His Roman ways did not appeal to the Parthians, and a claimant to the throne, Artabanus from Hyrcania, led a revolt against Vonones, who at first was successful and struck coins with the legend 'conqueror of Artabanus,' but Artabanus prevailed and drove Vonones out of the land. Vonones fled to Armenia where Tigranes IV had been deposed, and the throne was vacant. For little more than a year Vonones occupied the throne of Armenia, until Artabanus threatened an invasion and Vonones left for Roman exile in A.D. 16 (Tacitus, *Annals*, II, 1-4). The Romans, however, were not ready to abandon Armenia to Orodes son of Artabanus, so the new emperor Tiberius sent his adopted son Germanicus in A.D. 18 with an army to install Zeno, son of Polemo king of Pontus, as king of Armenia, with the new name Artaxias, and from 18 to 24 peace prevailed in Armenia, as well as between Rome and Parthia which gave Artabanus the opportunity to consolidate his rule.<sup>118</sup>

Our sources give little information about internal affairs in Parthia, but the coinage of Artabanus may reflect a turning point in Parthian history, for the epithet 'philhellene' which had appeared on the issues of previous kings was omitted on some issues, presumably late tetradrachms. This could signify an emphasis on an Iranian reaction to the Romanized Vonones whom Artabanus defeated, but it would be wrong to conclude solely from the coins that Artabanus followed an anti-Hellenic movement, since later coins return to the epithet which persisted down to the end of the dynasty. Artabanus, however, was from a collateral branch of the Arsacid family and thus represents a change from a pro-Roman to an independent Iranian policy for the Parthians. Josephus (*Antiquities*, XVIII, 48) says Artabanus was king of Media, while Tacitus (*Annals*, II, 3) says he grew up among the Dahii, to the east of the Caspian Sea where his family had marriage connections. Kahrstedt goes to great lengths to prove that Artabanus was not king of Atropatene but of Hyrcania.<sup>119</sup> Certainly Artabanus, according to our sources, took refuge and secured support in the east when pressed by Vonones and later rebels, but he also could have held kingship in

<sup>117</sup> Acc. to the *Res Gestae* (par. 32), he took refuge with the Romans. See also Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, XVIII, 42, where he attributes the uprising of Parthians to revision over the mother-son marriage. That Musa allowed herself to be defiled is suggested by a ring from Anatolia where she is identified as Thea Urania, perhaps to be identified with Anahita in Iran. Cf. R. Zahn, "Ein kleines historisches Monument," *Anatolian Studies presented to Wm. Ramsay*, ed. by W. H. Buckler (Manchester, 1923), 454-55.

<sup>118</sup> The history of Armenia is confused in this period. Orodes may have ruled Armenia for a few

years in the period A.D. 15-18 and perhaps fled to Parthia where he reappears at the head of a Parthian army to avenge the murder of his brother. See P. Asdonourian, *Die politischen Beziehungen zwischen Armenien und Rom* (Venice, 1911), 81. This is uncertain, however, and conjectural.

<sup>119</sup> U. Kahrstedt, *Artabanos III und seine Erbenn* (Bern, 1950), 12-16. In his arguments for Hyrcania as the homeland of Artabanus he is convincing but not so in including Carmania or greater Kerman as the other area of support for Artabanus as a dual kingdom.

Atropatene for a short period, since the local dynasty seems to have either died out or was replaced. In any case, Artabanus after defeating Vonones put his eldest son on the throne of Atropatene, which bound it closer to Parthia. The period from the accession of Artabanus to the end of Parthian rule is one of conflict followed by conciliation and then new hostilities with Rome. As many modern scholars, as well as ancient authors, have remarked, the Romans now considered the Parthians worthy opponents, and treaties between the two parties in 20 B.C., in A.D. 1 between Caius Caesar, grandson of Augustus, and Phraates, in A.D. 18 or 19 between Artabanus and Germanicus, nephew of Tiberius, and in A.D. 37 between Artabanus and L. Vitellius, Roman governor of Syria, all testify to the political equality of the two opponents.<sup>120</sup> Most of the reign of Artabanus was spent in restoring prestige and authority to the central government, and on the whole he was successful.

In Armenia, however, at the death of Zeno-Artaxias in 34, Artabanus installed his son Arsaces as king, and Tiberius sent a counter-claimant Tiridates, of the family of Phraates. Tiridates shortly died, and the Romans turned to Mithradates, brother of Pharasmanes, king of Iberia (Georgia), persuading him to seize the Armenian throne after the murder of Arsaces. Mithradates was successful and defeated the Parthian force led by another son of Artabanus, Orodes, who was killed. Mithradates then ruled Armenia amidst constant intrigues and warfare until 47. Artabanus at this time lost his influence, and a revolt of nobles caused Artabanus to flee to the east, as he had done in the time of Vonones (Tacitus, *Annals*, VI, 36). Again the Romans sent a pretender to the Parthian throne, Tiridates grandson of Phraates IV, across the Euphrates where he was crowned king. But Artabanus was able to return and Tiridates fled to Roman territory, and the peace of A.D. 37 was the result. This did not end internal problems for Artabanus, and the rest of his reign was troubled by the unrest of the nobility such that on one occasion Artabanus had to take refuge with Izates II of Adiabene, a client king. At the death of Artabanus, central power and authority had been shattered, and constant bickering for the throne followed him. The weakness of central authority which even an energetic ruler like Artabanus could not overcome became the hallmark of later Parthian history. The flights of Artabanus to Hyrcania and his restorations cannot have contributed to the stability of the state, and territory, or at least jurisdiction over some areas, was lost in the east as well as the west. The district of Herat may have been lost to Gondophares in the reign of Artabanus, for his coins predominate among the Parthian coins overstruck by Gondophares.<sup>121</sup> At the same time that Parthian central authority suffered, Parthian princes were installed as client rulers in various areas and thereby Parthian influence was spread through internarrriage more than conquest. But the client princes had equal claim to the Parthian throne, and civil wars became endemic.

<sup>120</sup> On the treaties of Ziegler, *op. cit.* [n. 62], 48-64. Most of the provisions of the agreements stressed the return to a status quo after hostilities, and the Euphrates border of the Romans remained constant, whereas Armenia continued to be an area of discord.

<sup>121</sup> Kahstedt, *op. cit.* [n. 119], 34-35. All of Kahstedt's surmises, given as history, need not be accepted; for example, the identification of Abda-

At the death of Artabanus, presumably his son Vardanes succeeded him, although his descent is uncertain as is that of his rival Vologeses I. Coins fall us, primarily because the city of Seleucia, with dated tetradrachms, had revolted in the last years of Artabanus, and we do not know when Vardanes or Gotarzes ruled there.<sup>122</sup> Civil war, interspersed with truces, lasted until 47, when Vardanes was murdered, and Gotarzes became sole ruler. Some of the Parthian nobles, headed by a member of the Karen family, opposed Gotarzes and turned to Rome, asking that Mithradates (called Meherdates, the current pronunciation, by Tacitus), son of Vonones and grandson of Phraates, be sent to be king. He was defeated and captured by Gotarzes, however, and the outside threat ended. On the death of Gotarzes in 51 by disease or accident, he was succeeded by Vonones, who had been ruler of Atropatene, according to Tacitus (*Annals*, XII, 14, 7), but who ruled a very short time and was followed by his son, Vologeses I. His brother Pacorus became king of Atropatene, and he determined to put another brother Tiridates on the throne of Armenia, which had become vacant by the murder of Mithradates in 52. Vologeses was successful, but Rome was aroused, and the new emperor Nero, who succeeded Claudius in 54, sent an experienced general Co. Corbulo to retrieve Roman prestige; for the ebb and flow of Roman-Parthian relations, especially in regard to Armenia, mostly concerned a matter of honor for the respective parties rather than actual gain or loss of territory, since neither side was able to incorporate Armenia as an integral part of their own domains. The struggle on the frontiers of the Roman and Parthian empires was to continue through Byzantine and Sasanian times to the coming of Islam, a period of more than half a millennium, and the two arms of the 'Fertile Crescent,' Syria and Iraq, although united in language and culture, were to develop different traditions, one looking to the west and the other to the east. In Classical sources we find references to the desire of the Iranians, first Parthians then Sasanians, to reach the Mediterranean and restore the empire of the Achaemenids, even though any memory of the Achaemenids was becoming hazy for the Iranians.

The war between Vologeses and Corbulo was complicated for the Parthians by revolts in the east, according to Tacitus (*Annals*, XIII, 7 and 37) by a son of Vardanes and the Hyrcanians. This latter revolt was serious, and ambassadors from the Hyrcanians came to Corbulo, and the revolt seems to have resulted in a kind of independence for that eastern region from direct Parthian control (XV, 2). In 58 Corbulo, however, drove Tiridates from Armenia, although hostilities did not end, for Tiridates continued to struggle, supported by his brothers Vologeses of Parthia and Pacorus of Atropatene. The Romans, however, installed Tigranes, great-grandson of Archelaus of Commagene, as their king of Armenia, and Tigranes in 61 launched his own invasion of Adiabene which provoked a countermove by the Parthians. After much fighting, a peace was arranged in 63, and the conflict came to an end with the understanding that Tiridates would be recognized as king of Armenia, but that he would receive a crown from Nero in Rome, an indication of a nominal Roman

<sup>122</sup> Josephus, *Antiquities*, XX, 3, 4, implies that Gotarzes, as Josephus says, then the struggle Vardanes immediately succeeded Artabanus, his between Vardanes and Gotarzes could have been father, while Tacitus, *Annals*, XI, 8, suggests that an attempt of the Arsacid ruler of Atropatene to Gotarzes succeeded Artabanus on the throne. If take over the central power. Vologeses, from Atropatene, was a brother of

gases, who revolted against Artabanus and supported Tiridates, with the Indo-Parthian ruler of the same name is most unlikely. Also his statement that under Vologeses I Persis was lost by the Parthians makes little sense; Persis continued as a client state to the end of the dynasty, even though in some periods Parthian influence was stronger than in others. The striking of coins is no sure sign of absolute independence.

hegemony over Armenia, but in reality it meant little. The trip of Tiridates to Rome and the celebrations which took place there in 66 were recorded by Dio Cassius (LXII) and Tacitus (XVI, 23), and they heralded a peace between the Romans and Parthians which lasted for half a century.<sup>123</sup> Rome had failed to impose its will, perhaps not understanding fully the importance of local loyalties to the intermarried royal houses of the principalities in this part of the Near East. Perhaps Roman supply lines and difficult logistics made Roman attempts either to make Armenia a province of their empire or a client state with a Roman-appointed ruler unfeasible, but, in any case, Corbulo was the agent of the change in Roman policy. The marriage ties of Parthian and Armenian nobility certainly did not help the Roman cause in Armenia or in other frontier states. The later Roman answer to Parthian inter-family connections in the east, the conferring of Roman titles of general, senator or consul on local dynasts, also failed to win support, and the Arsacid family connections in the courts of Armenia, Adiabene and others were to prove more important.

From notices in Tacitus and Cassius Dio about Hyrcanian ambassadors to the Romans, modern authors have deduced the existence of a Roman client state in the east.<sup>124</sup> More likely is simply the opposition of local inhabitants to demands of the Parthian king and his refusal to recognize the rights of Hyrcania similar to Atropatene or Armenia. Without information, it is surely excessive to call Hyrcania a Roman client state because the Hyrcanians sought Roman help. Based on geographical data from Prolemy and elsewhere, Schur (*op. cit.*, 64–79) constructs a history of two powerful states in eastern Iran, Aria and Hyrcania, which expanded and contracted according to Parthian involvement with Rome. All is conjecture and must be so regarded. The Parthians themselves sought Roman aid against an invasion of the Alans from north of the Caucasus in 75 but it was refused by Vespasian which soured the Roman-Parthian friendship.<sup>125</sup> It is not possible to discuss Roman designs for the conquest of the Albanians, and the desire to open a land route to India over the Caspian through Hyrcania, if the Romans really had such extensive plans, but the Parthians in this period were hardly as isolated and reduced to a small area of rule as some scholars have proposed.<sup>126</sup> Vologeses rather increased his authority and prestige compared to his predecessors; he founded a city Vologestia as a rival to Seleucia and was interested in promoting trade.<sup>127</sup> He has been characterized as an anti-Hellenic king who promoted an Iranian cultural reaction solely on the basis of Aramaic letters appearing upon a few of the coins he struck, which is hardly strong evidence for a reversal of policy, since his coins continue with the legend 'phithhellene'. Likewise the possible

attribution to this king of the collecting of the fragments of the Avesta in the later Middle Persian book the *Denkart* also does not mean such a change. The Romans evidently had a great respect for Vologeses, since they expanded the system of roads and fortifications in Syria under the Flavian emperors who succeeded Nero.<sup>128</sup>

The end of the reign of Vologeses, however, is unclear, for the coins seem to include a conflict with a Pacorus, whose relationship to Vologeses is unknown, but the latter's coins end about 78 or 79, while coins of Pacorus begin about the same time.<sup>129</sup> An unresolved numismatic problem is the existence of coins with the name Vologeses but with a completely different bust and crown than the usual issues of Vologeses. Some numismatists have postulated another Vologeses, a rebel against Vologeses I, while others have attributed the coins to a later king with the name Vologeses.<sup>130</sup> A later Byzantine source, Zonaras (XI, 18 or 578 C), mentions a Parthian king Artabanus as ruling Parthia at the time of the eruption of Mt. Vesuvius in 79, but he is mentioned nowhere else, although coins have been attributed to him. One incident mentioned by the sources is that of the pseudo-Nero, a Roman who claimed to be the murdered emperor, but who had to take refuge with the Parthians. This did not serve to improve relations between the two powers, and continued fortification of Roman border territory, the *limes*, did not augur well for future peaceful relations between the two. The balance between the powers was to be upset by Trajan who became Roman emperor in 98.

In Parthia Pacorus had a long reign not free from trouble, however, of which we have no information, but the long series of coins indicate a long rule, perhaps to 105, although the end date of his rule is unknown. Internal affairs in the Parthian domains are veiled in this period, but at the time of Trajan's accession in 98, hints in Classical sources indicate internal instability and perhaps wars even civil war there. A certain Chosroes (*husru*), perhaps a brother-in-law of Pacorus, issued coins and at the same time so did Vologeses II, whose relationship with Pacorus is unknown.<sup>131</sup> We may only say that the reigns of Chosroes (also called Orses on coins) and Vologeses were contemporaneous. The pedigrees and the reigns of later Parthian kings are uncertain, and the entire second century is a 'dark period' of Parthian history since there are no inscriptions, the coins are highly stylized, and the Romans only showed an interest when they invaded Parthian domains. This is why we cannot tell whether there were two rulers called Vologeses in this period, based solely on coins.

In the time of Trajan, we hear of a Parthian general Sinatruces, son of Mithradates and father of a Vologeses who received a portion of Armenia to rule from the Romans, according to Cassius Dio (LXVIII, 30), but whether this Sinatruces is to be

<sup>123</sup> For details of this period see W. Schur, *Die Orientalistik des Kaisers Nero*, Klio, Beiheft, 15 (Weisbaden, 1923), 29–32. Schur does not subscribe to the theory that Tigranes was put aside by the Romans because he could not command support among the Armenians, but this seems to have been the case, for the Roman or Augustan policy of imposing a Roman vassal in Armenia was a failure. Cf. Ziegler, *op. cit.* [n. 62], 75–77; Kahrsfeldt, *op. cit.* [n. 119], 83, and others.

<sup>124</sup> Schur, *op. cit.* [n. 123], 37–38; cf. Josephus, *JWars*, VII, 245.

<sup>125</sup> Ziegler, *op. cit.* [n. 62], 80.

<sup>126</sup> Schur, *op. cit.* [n. 123], 80–85. Romans did reach the shores of the Caspian as a Latin inscription of the XII legio Fulminata from the time of Domitian (81–96) indicates. See K. Trever, *Osterei po isonii i kulturne Karakzskoi Albani* (Moscow, 1959), 342–46. The significance of this inscription, however, should not be inflated, for conquests of Domitian so far east are unknown in literary sources.

<sup>127</sup> A. Marq, "Vologésias, l'empire de Césis-phon," *Syria*, 36 (1959), 271. See n. 91.

<sup>128</sup> Ziegler, *op. cit.* [n. 62], 80, for references.

<sup>129</sup> Sellwood, *op. cit.* [ch. 7, n. 57], 220–26, proposes two kings of the same name, Vologeses I (51–78) and Vologeses II (77–80), on the basis of different coin types, but this is hardly enough to prove a second ruler at that time.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 226–28; Debevoise, *op. cit.* [ch. 7, n. 64], 214, n. 3.

<sup>131</sup> In relying on numismatics it should be emphasized that only Parthian tetradrachms, which were minted at Seleucia alone, give a date

and frequently the personal name of the king. The drachms, which are much more numerous, are highly stylized and with several exceptions give no personal names. Furthermore, local kings in Atropatene and elsewhere on the Iranian plateau may have struck coins in Parthian style, so numismatics must be used with care. For a new method of identification on the coins see D. G. Sellwood "A Die-Engraver Sequence for Later Parthian Drachms," *NC*, 7 series, 7 (1967), 13–28.

identified with a ruler of the same name in Edessa, c. 91–109 and whether this Vologeses later became Vologeses II (or III) of Parthia is mere conjecture. Names of Arsacid princes do occur in the Classical sources, but it is not possible to make a genealogical table of the Arsacids in this period.

The war of Trajan against the Parthians has been studied by many scholars, notably by J. Guey followed by Lepper whose reconstructions generally have been accepted.<sup>132</sup> We are not here concerned with the causes of Rome's aggression, whether economic to control trade routes to the east, or a personal desire of Trajan for fame and glory, or, as suggested only by Lepper, as an attempt to stabilize the frontier by advances into enemy country from the *limes* which Trajan had continued to build, following the Flavian emperors. Certainly Rome was the aggressor, even though Armenian affairs became a pretext. For Chosroes encouraged one son of Pacorus, Parthamasiris, to replace his brother or half-brother called Axidares in Armenia which happened, but since the latter had the support of Rome, Trajan arrived in the east in 114 to begin a war against the Armenians in which he was successful such that Armenia was proclaimed a Roman province. Trajan organized better the *limes* system, and in 116 he invaded Adiabene and put its king Mebarsapes to flight. The land of Adiabene was annexed as well as the entire basin of the Tigris–Euphrates as Maricq has brilliantly shown.<sup>133</sup> The Romans, however, were far too extended, even if there was no unified Parthia opposing them, and revolts broke out in 116, and Trajan was obliged to retreat from Ctesiphon which he had captured in 117. He failed in his attempt to capture Hatra, the caravan city in the desert of Mesopotamia, and shortly afterward he died of illness. We are not here concerned with Roman history, but the farthest advance of the Romans, to the Persian Gulf, under Trajan must have made a strong impression on the Parthians. Some scholars, such as Maricq, have argued that Trajan intended to advance the boundaries of the Roman Empire to the Zagros mountains in the east, a natural barrier. This view, however, conflicts with the activity of Trajan in building roads and forts along the *limes* of the Syrian desert and upper Mesopotamia, and Lepper's view that Trajan in reality followed a policy of penetration beyond the *limes* to secure the real borders of the empire, behind the *limes*, seems more accurate. Trade with the east was surely important, but any plan to incorporate all the land to the Persian Gulf must have seemed unrealistic to many Romans, as it did to Hadrian, successor of Trajan. Perhaps the most important result of the peace of Hadrian was the abandonment of the Trajanic policy of annexation of client states in the east as provinces of the Roman Empire, and a return to the policy of client kingdoms. This gave an opportunity for small trading city-states such as Hatra, Mesene and Palmyra to flourish.

<sup>132</sup> J. Guey, "Essai sur la guerre parthique de Trajan," *Bibliothèque d'Isis*, 2 (Buckarest, 1937), 160 pp., and F. A. Lepper, *Trajan's Parthian War* (Oxford, 1948), 224 pp., with further references. Lepper systematically analyzes especially the chronology of Trajan's campaigns. E. J. Keall, "Oros: Rebel King or Royal Delegate?" *Cornucopia*, 3 (Toronto, 1975), 17–32, argues that Chosroes never acted in concert with Trajan but always in defense of his suzerain Vologeses.

<sup>133</sup> A. Maricq, "La province d'Assyrie" créé par Trajan," *Syria*, 36 (1959), 257. Whether most Romans thought they could hold the three new provinces of Armenia, Mesopotamia and Assyria (Babylonia) with the client state Mesene, at the head of the Persian Gulf, is conjectural. Trajan must have considered his conquests as permanent, while his trip to the Persian Gulf had something of the bravado of Alexander the Great.

As noted, the second century is a dark century in Parthian history, and the reigns of Hadrian, Antoninus Pius and Vologeses II reveal no activity on the Parthian frontier. The mention of Bactrian and Hyrcanian envoys in the time of Antoninus indicates the continued independence of Hyrcania from the Parthian central authority while the Bactrians are surely the Kushans.<sup>134</sup> Vologeses III (or IV; c. 147–191) may have taken advantage of the accession of Marcus Aurelius to break the long peace and the fixed frontiers of the Euphrates between the two states, but the apparent reason for the war was his attempt to dislodge a Roman client ruler in Armenia who had been installed by Antoninus about 140.<sup>135</sup> The Parthians were successful in putting a new king on the throne of Cappadocia, called Pacorus, and in annihilating a Roman army led by the governor of Cappadocia, Severianus. The Romans, however, retaliated, and a strong army soon took the Armenian capital of Artaxata in 163 and replaced Pacorus with a prince, Sohaemus, of the royal family of Edessa and a Roman senator as well. To the south another army in 164–165 advanced as far as Seleucia which was destroyed by the Roman general Avidius Cassius, while Ctesiphon, the capital, was taken and plundered. Sickness, however, caused a retreat of the Romans, and peace was reestablished in about 166. Under the peace treaty, which is not mentioned by our sources, the old boundaries were rectified a little in favor of the Romans, by making the town of Nisibis and the Khabur River with the Singara mountains (Jabal Singar) the boundaries of Roman territory. Armenia's Sohaemus was recognized as king. Peace remained between the two states even when the opportunity to support Avidius Cassius in his revolt against Marcus Aurelius in 175 was presented to Vologeses. The quick fall of Cassius and the intervention of the Roman emperor in the east to regulate affairs with local rulers, and with ambassadors from Vologeses, strengthened the peace which lasted through the reign of Commodus (180–192).

In Parthia Vologeses III seems to have had a rival called Chosroes who is known only by his coins, and he cannot have reigned long even over only a part of Parthia towards the end of the rule of Vologeses.<sup>136</sup> The latter was succeeded by another Vologeses whose relationship to his namesake is unknown. The next to last Vologeses supported Pescennius Niger as claimant to the Roman throne in 193, but the victor was Septimius Severus. The Parthians and their allies, however, in the period of Roman civil war, had taken some territory and towns and refused to return them to Roman rule.<sup>137</sup> Thus Severus crossed the Euphrates in 196 and had some success, but in 196 he was recalled to Gaul by a revolt. Nonetheless, the Romans maintained their eastern boundary of the Khabur and Singara mountains. The absence of Severus emboldened the Parthians to attack, and much territory in Mesopotamia came into their hands. Severus, having settled affairs in the west, returned and invaded the Parthian domains, capturing and sacking Ctesiphon in 198, and Vologeses fled from the city. Again it was not the Parthians but rather the devastated countryside which

<sup>134</sup> Envoys came in the time of Hadrian, according to the *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, Hadrian, 21, 14, and in the time of Antoninus (Aurelius Victor, *De Caesaribus*, *Epitome* 15, 4).

<sup>135</sup> For sources see M.-L. Chaumont, *Recherches sur l'histoire d'Arménie* (Paris, 1969), 15–16. Armenian history in this period is also dark.

<sup>136</sup> Sellwood, *Coinage of Parthia* [ch. 7, n. 57], 281. No mention of this Chosroes is found in any literary source.

<sup>137</sup> By allies, the rulers of Adiabene and Orhoene (to the west of Nisibis) are meant. Cf. Cassius Dio (LXXV, 1).

caused a Roman retreat, this time up the Tigris River. A long siege of Hatra in 199 failed, and Severus had to return to Syria and apparently peace was made, based on the status quo before the war, although sources again do not tell us about a peace treaty.

Vologeses died about 207 and was succeeded by his son of the same name, but sometime later Artabanus, another son, contested the throne; the civil war was incited by Caracalla according to Cassius Dio (LXXVIII, 2a). Caracalla looked for fame in conquest of the east, and in 214 he found a pretext in two exiles who had taken refuge with the Parthians, but Vologeses, pressed by internal problems, surrendered the fugitives to Caracalla. The latter, however, was determined to find an excuse for invasion, so when Artabanus gained the upper hand in Parthia in 216 the Roman emperor asked for the hand of the daughter of Artabanus in marriage which was refused by the Parthian king. Caracalla then invaded Adiabene, and Artabanus fled to the east but soon returned to the attack. Caracalla was assassinated, however, in 217, and he was succeeded by Macrinus who sought peace. Artabanus rejected the overture for peace by the Romans and advanced toward Nisibis where an indecisive battle was fought, after which peace was made by the payment of an indemnity by the Romans to the Parthians. The end of the Parthian Empire, however, was in sight, and only the final dates of the two Parthian rulers, Vologeses and Artabanus, are in doubt because of coins which indicate that the former continued to rule until 228 while Artabanus continued to 227.<sup>138</sup> The Parthians were to fall to a new dynasty from Persis, the Sasanians.

#### HELLENISM AND THE IRANIAN REVIVAL

The Parthians have long suffered denigration from their successors, the Sasanians, as well as from their enemies, the Romans, and modern scholars usually have followed the ancient sources to give bad publicity for the Parthians as destroyers of the Hellenic heritage of the Seleucids. This reputation is undeserved, for the Parthians were neither enemies and destroyers of Hellenism nor traitors to the Iranian heritage of the Achaemenids and non-Zoroastrians, as has been asserted. For almost half a millennium the Parthians dominated the history of the Iranian plateau, and they finally were recognized as worthy opponents and equals in warfare and diplomacy by the Romans.<sup>139</sup> A review of the cultural achievements of the Parthians is in order.

To begin with Hellenism, it must be re-emphasized that the epithet *philhellene* remained on most of the coins struck by the Parthian rulers to the end of the dynasty, and there is no evidence of either a prolonged or effective policy of attack on Hellenic culture of any of the Arsacid kings. The tradition of independence of those cities called *polis* was also continued from Seleucid times through most of the Parthian rule. The two most striking examples, of which we have source material, are Seleucia and Susa, both of which issued their own coinage and maintained their own institutions from Seleucid to Parthian rule. The Greek influence in both, quite naturally, became

weaker, as the Hellenic population became absorbed by local people, but Hellenic features nonetheless persisted in these two cities. In December of the year 21 A.D. King Artabanus III wrote a letter to the city of Susa relating to the election of a certain Hestaios, and, as has been remarked, the letter which is preserved on an inscription is to a Greek *polis*, of which the constitution is Greek, and the administration of the city is Greek.<sup>140</sup> Even though an Arsacid era beginning 247 B.C. was introduced by the Parthians, the Seleucid calendar remained more popular and, just as the native name Susa was used for the city, so also the Seleucid designation Seleucia on the Eulaius River remained in use until the end of the Parthian rule, all evidence of the tolerance for and even support of Hellenism by the Parthian rulers. Shortly after Artabanus, c. 45, the kings of Elymais took the city, and they issued coins in their form of the Aramaic alphabet and a dialect of the Aramaic language. The rulers of Elymais remained in control of Susa until the end of the Parthian dynasty. An inscription of the last Artabanus, in the Parthian language and alphabet and dated to 215, found in the excavations, attests a return of the city to Arsacid allegiance.<sup>141</sup> Seleucia on the Tigris did revolt against the Parthians, but it was destroyed by the Romans. In both cities royal and local coinage existed, and it seems as though the Parthians were just as much, if not more, champions of Greek culture as the Romans. In any case, as far as we can see, Hellenism was not proscribed under the Parthians.

One subject which has not been touched is commerce and trade, but we have no information from Parthia proper about such matters; rather the small states of the 'Fertile Crescent' and even the Kushans in the east supply us with some information even though sparse. The Parthians were not great traders or merchants, but they did not by any means follow an anti-commercial policy but rather the contrary. One factor in the decline of Parthia in its last two centuries can be seen in the debasement of the coinage beginning with Artabanus III. Compared to earlier coins not only do the style and quality of the coins suffer, but in the tetradrachms the amount of silver declines.<sup>142</sup> Whether this is the result of the loss of silver mines or, more likely economic crises affecting especially the mint of Seleucia, we do not know. The population and cultivated land of the Susa plain in Parthian times was about three times that of the Achaemenid period according to an archaeological survey.<sup>143</sup> In the Parthian period land under irrigation and cultivation was increased over earlier times but not so much as the maximum use under the Sasanians. Again our sources fail us. The Roman wars undoubtedly adversely affected trade and commerce in the Parthian realm, but central weakness was more important than other factors contributing to the fall of the Parthians.

The art of the Parthians has been discussed many times, and it is now generally agreed that just as the Parthians did not impose themselves on local rulers and cultures,

<sup>140</sup> Le Rider, *op. cit.* [ch. 6, n. 25], 35-36 and 421-22.

<sup>141</sup> R. Ghirshman, "Une bas-relief d'Artaban V avec inscription en pehlevi arsacide," *Monuments*

*Plur.*, 44 (1950), 97-107, corrected by W. B. Henning in "The Monuments and Inscriptions of Tang-i Sarvak," *AMJ.*, 2 (1952), 151-78.

<sup>142</sup> On the debasement of the coinage, especially

the tetradrachms, see W. Wroth, *Catalogue of the Coins of Parthia*, in *The Greek Coins in the British Museum*, (London, 1903), lxv, and Sellwood, *op. cit.* [ch. 7, n. 57], 5.

<sup>143</sup> R. J. Wenke, "Imperial Investments and Agricultural Development in Parthian and Sasanian Khuzestan," *Mesopotamian*, 10-11 (Florence, 1975-76), 43.

<sup>138</sup> See B. Simonetta, "Vologese V, Artabanus V e Artavasse," *Nunimianica*, 19-20 (Perugia, 1953-54), 1-4. Sellwood, *op. cit.* [ch. 7, n. 57], dates the Simonetta, ruled after 227 for a short time.

<sup>139</sup> See the convincing arguments of Ziegler, *op. cit.* [n. 62], 140, *et passim*.

so in the arts they allowed local schools to flourish. The Arsacid kings were not only 'philhellene' in policy towards Hellenized conquered peoples, but also in the arts, but this early dependence changed in the last two centuries of Parthian rule and we find a Parthian style developing. In painting and sculpture the concept of 'frontality' dominated Parthian art after the beginning of our era. Without discussing many questions about the origins of this style and other features of Parthian art, it should be noted that Parthian art and architecture, such as is preserved, both are 'popular' in the sense that both Achaemenid and Sasanian art are not.<sup>144</sup> Rather in them the overwhelming stamp of the rulers is obvious. The Parthian age was not an 'imperial age' as both Achaemenid and Sasanian, but Parthian remains reflect rather the many currents of culture among the populace. The more that archaeologists uncover from Parthian sites, the more significant appears the importance of the Parthian period as a prelude to Sasanian art, culture and institutions. The opposition of Hellenistic to the 'Oriental' art of the Parthians has been overly stressed, in my opinion, as has been the dichotomy between 'East and West' represented by Parthians and Romans. This is not to deny the fundamental differences between 'theoretical' Hellenistic and Roman art as opposed to 'theoretical' Parthian art, between representation of nature or realism as opposed to expressionism and stylized art, so ably sketched by Avi-Yonah.<sup>145</sup> The situation, however, was complex, and the influences of so many peoples such as Armenians, Nabataeans, Mesopotamians and others make the cultural and artistic panorama of the Near East at this time more complicated than the 'Hellenistic-Oriental' division. Perhaps one should look at the last century and a half of Parthian rule and from the meager sources show the change from an earlier 'Hellenistic' dominated age to one of Parthian autonomy in the realm of culture and institutions.

In art the Hellenistic heritage had changed in the first century of our era from a syncretic Hellenistic-Iranian *koïnè* to the Greco-Buddhist or Gandharan art in the east under the Kushans, and in western Iran to a Parthian art with total 'frontality,' portrayal of the 'Parthian gallop' with horsemen in paintings or sculptures, the Parthian costumes and the use of *ayvans* in architecture and domed vaults, all hallmarks of later Parthian culture. In writing, Greek had lost its predominance, and Aramaic had been replaced by Parthian, a change symbolic of the change from early to late Parthian times.<sup>146</sup>

<sup>144</sup> On 'frontality' see G. A. Kosheleiko, "O frontálnosti v Parfjanskom iskusstve," in *Istoriko-arkheolog. sbornik u čestj A. V. Arisikovskogo* (Moscow, 1962), 135-36, who stresses the religious-ideological changes which induced artists to stress frontality. Schlumberger, *L'Orient Hellénisé* (Ic), 7, n. 761, 198, stresses the origin from archaic Greek art, while M. A. R. Colledge, *Parthian Art* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1977), 143-44 summarizes 'frontality' in this period. On the ancient Oriental origin of 'frontality' see M. Avi-Yonah, *Oriental Art in Roman Palestine* (Rome, 1961), 76-79.

<sup>145</sup> *Avi-Yonah, ibid.*, 10-12. It is not possible to discuss such fascinating topics as round cities of the Parthians and the architectural innovations which are found in the Parthian period. Cf. G. A. Kosheleiko, "Partfjanskaya fortifikatsiya," 54 no.

2 (1963), 69-71. In building techniques a difference between Greeks and Parthians could be illustrated in the use of pillars: for the former they were fundamental and walls were added to them; for the Parthians walls came first and pillars were decorations.

<sup>146</sup> On Aramaic to Parthian see the discussion in P. W. Coxon, "The Nisa Ostraca: Ur-Ideographic Texts?" *AAH*, 21 (1973), 185-204, and the examples of late Parthian writing on inscriptions, p. 56, *tribun MLKYI MLK' BRY ulgšy MLKYI MLK'BNY' hnsk ZK ZY hnsk šuf šhry*, "Artabanus King of Kings, son of Vologeses, King of Kings built this stela" which is of *hnsk*, strap of Susa," and p. 69 *šrk ulgšy MLKYI M(LK)*, "Arsaces Vologeses King of Kings," in R. Ghirshman, *Iran, Parthians and Sassanians* (N.Y., 1962).

We have no Parthian literary remains from the Parthian period, but the existence of a large poetic or minstrel oral literature has been cogently proposed.<sup>147</sup> The Iranian national epic as preserved in the *Shahname* of Firdosi is primarily of eastern Iranian origin and incorporates Parthian heroes such as King Gotarzes in the tales which have survived. Yet the epic is not concerned with the wars between the Parthians and the Romans, but with older struggles of the rulers of the east and the struggle between Iran and Turan, the latter an uncertain people and place in the east, but more mythical than real, later identified with the land of the Turks. The traces of Parthian culture and society in later literature such as the Middle Persian text the *Draxt i Asurig* 'Assyrian (Babylonian) tree,' and the *Yadegar i Zartiran* 'Memorial of Zartir,' and the New Persian poem, *Vīs u Rāmīn*, are what one would expect, a heroic, chivalric society which could be called 'feudal' in a general sense. This is also the society and culture depicted in Firdosi's epic, and the heritage is clearly from Parthian times. This society and culture has little influence from Hellenism other than possible borrowings of stories or motifs, of Herakles to Rustam for example, while the Iranian character of the epic is paramount. Thus by the end of the Parthian period the Iranian revival had absorbed Hellenistic elements but existed in its own right in domains of art and culture, not to mention government, religion and society. The history of the Parthians, however, cannot be divorced from that of their powerful eastern neighbors, the Kushans, with their great king Kanishka, or from the history of the small states in western Iran and Babylonia where archaeology has revealed much of Parthian influences, and to these we must now turn.

<sup>147</sup> M. Boyce, "The Parthian *gōšan* and Iranian Minstrel Tradition," *JRAS* (1957), 10-45, and her "Zartades and Zartir," *BSOAS*, 17 (1955), esp. 476-77.