Published: July 20, 2005
Last Updated: June 12, 2019

TIGRAN II

TIGRAN II, THE GREAT, king of Armenia (r. 95-55 BCE). Tigran (Tigranes) II was the most distinguished member of the so-called Artašēsid/Artaxiad dynasty (see ARTAXIAS I), which has now been identified as a branch of the earlier Eruandid dynasty of Iranian origin attested as ruling in Armenia from at least the 5th century B.C.E (see Armenia and Iran ii.; see also ARMENO-IRANIAN RELATIONS). During Tigran's reign Armenia briefly reached its widest extension in the vacuum of power resulting from the final decline of the Seleucids, the still incomplete consolidation of the Parthian empire, and the absence as yet of Rome's full commitment to an expansionist policy in the East. Despite considerable information, Tigran's achievements have been difficult to reconstruct and evaluate, because of the almost exclusively classical sources, whose treatment of him, as the son-in-law and supporter of Rome's greatest enemy Mithradates VI Eupator (r. 120-63 BCE) of Pontus, is invariably hostile, and the much later and anachronistic account in the Armenian *History* of Movsēs Xorenac'i.

The beginning of Tigran II's reign in 95BCE was not auspicious. He apparently succeeded his father Tigran I, of whom nothing is known beyond a few possible copper coins, rather than his uncle, as has sometimes been argued. At the time, he was held as hostage in Persia, having been surrendered after the defeat of his father's predecessor and brother, Artawazd I, in the first attack on Armenia by the Parthian king Mithradates II the Great (r. 123-88 BCE). In order to obtain his release on his accession to the throne, Tigran II was forced to surrender "seventy valleys" to the Parthians according to Strabo (11.14.15).

Tigran's first concern on coming to the throne, was to consolidate his power at home by absorbing the adjacent south-western kingdom of Sophene, which had split off by 188 BCE under a separate branch of the Eruandid dynasty and which his predecessors had been unable to conquer. As a result, he ruled once again over the entire territory which had presumably been held by the earlier Eruandids.

The beginning of Tigran's expansion had been purely local, but his next move brought him into conflict with Roman interests. His marriage to Cleopatra, the daughter of Mithradates VI of Pontus, caused him to support his father-in-law's attempt to annex the neighboring kingdom of Cappadocia, whose ruler was a client of Rome (Justin, 38.3.1-3). The first encounter of Tigran with Rome was inconclusive. The general Sulla sent by the Roman Senate drove Mithradates VI's candidate from the Cappadocian throne and concluded in 92 an agreement with Mithradates II of Parthia which first set the Roman-Iranian frontier on the Euphrates (Plutarch, *Sulla* 5*;* Appian, *Mithr.* 12.8.55-57).

For the next decade Tigran does not seem to have pursued an anti-Roman policy. He may have renewed his treaty of alliance with Pontus, but he held himself aside as long as possible from his father-in-law's bitter conflict with the Roman state. During this period, his attention was primarily focused on the threat in the east of the Parthian empire, temporarily weakened by the death of Mithradates II in 88 BCE. After the retaking of the "seventy valleys" ceded at Tigran's accession, a series of campaigns from 88 to 85 BCE carried the Armenian armies as far as the Parthian summer residence near Ecbatana in Media. They gained a series of victories which added the principalities of Atropatene, Gordiene, Adiabene, Osrhoene, and Mygdonia in modern Iranian Azarbaijan and Mesopotamia to Tigran's Armenian lands and justified his assumption of the Achaemenid title "king of kings," which appears on his coins after 85 BCE (Strabo, 11.13.2, 14.15; Appian, *Syr.* 11.8.48; Justin, 11.3).

The next conquests of Tigran II were still not aimed directly at Roman interests. One of the parties in Syria, weary of the constant internal strife between the last of the Seleucids, is said to have appealed to the Armenian king, offering him the crown (Justin, 40.1.1-3). Tigran's new campaigns (84-83 BCE) resulted in his annexation of Cilicia Pedias and Commagene and the capture of Antioch on the Orontes, but he stopped short of Judea, according to Josephus (*Ant.* 13.16.41*;Wars* 1.5.3), though Appian (*Syr.* 11.8.48) asserts that the Armenian armies reached as far south as Egypt. A new province of Syria, probably including Cilicia, was created with one of Tigran's Armenian

generals, Magadates or probably Bagadates/Bagarat, as governor (ibid.), while the king's brother Guras was left in command of the important city of Nisibis in Mesopotamia (Plutarch, *Luc.* 32.3-5). The taking of Antioch was commemorated by a large silver tetradrachm bearing the king's portrait on the obverse and on the reverse the *tyche* of the city represented in the customary Hellenistic fashion as a seated woman wearing a turreted crown and holding the palm of victory (Der Nersessian, pl. 24). In the following years, Tigran's empire, which now reached from the Mediterranean to the Caspian, was further enlarged by his conquest of the Phoenecian cities as well as of Cappadocia.

The new empire soon needed a new capital, as the former royal residence of Artašat north of the Araxes was now too distant from its center. The precise site of the new capital of Tigranakert/Tigranocerta is still disputed and will not be conclusively identified until archeological excavations validate the various hypotheses, but both Appian *(Mithr.* 12.12.84, 86) and Plutarch *(Luc.* 26.2, 29.3) testify to its splendor, and the booty taken by Lucullus after the sack of the city was estimated at 8,000 talents.

The empire itself, however, despite its extension and wealth (as mentioned above), derived largely from the control of the great cities of Syria and Phoenicia and the transit trade through Mesopotamia (cf. MK, 2.24), does not seem to have achieved any homogeneity. The conquered Hellenized states kept their various languages and most of their institutions, while the homeland preserved the rudimentary aristocratic pattern of multiple para-feudal principalities, later called "strategies" by Pliny the Elder (*N.H.* 6.10.27), which would eventually develop into the *naxarar* system of the early Christian period. The four vassal kings who were in permanent attendance on Tigran II, according to Plutarch *(Luc.* 26,5), may well be the prototypes of the four great marcher lords or *bdeašx*s, who ranked above the greatest magnates in Arsacid Armenia. Temporary measures were resorted to for the population of the new capital as well as for the control of strategic economic areas such as the transportation of goods over the Euphrates. In these cases, Tigran II resorted for the most part to the method of forcible transfer of populations common in antiquity. Nomadic Arabs were settled to supervise the Euphrates trade (Plutarch, *Luc*. 21.4; Pliny, *N.H*. 6.32.142). The inhabitants of Mazaka (subsequently Caesarea) in Cappadocia, as well as other Greek cities and Armenian settlers, were transported to provide the necessary population for newly created Tigranakert (Strabo, 11.14.15; 12.2.9; Appian, *Mithr.* 10.67;

Plutarch, *Luc.,* 26.l).

The reign of Tigran II is usually considered to have marked the apex of the Hellenization, which Armenia shared with Pontus and the neighboring states of the Near East. There is no doubt that many of the urban foundations of the period were of the Hellenistic type. The new capital itself bore the characteristically eponymous name of Tigranakert "Tigran's foundation," following the Hellenistic pattern of the ubiquitous Alexandrias, Seleucias, or Antiochs. From the descriptions which have survived it appears to have been a city of classical type, with an acropolis, a royal palace, and even a theater (Plutarch, *Luc.* 29.4). The court language was presumably Greek, since Tigran's queen Cleopatra of Pontus welcomed Greek philosophers and rhethoricians to her philhellenic court. Their son Artawazd II was said to have written tragedies and other works in Greek. Greek actors were invited for the inauguration of the new theater at Tigranakert, and guests at the marriage of Artawazd's sister to the Parthian heir were entertained with a performance of Euripides' *Bacchae* (Plut., *Luc.* 22, 29; *Crassus* 33).

Despite this evident Hellenization, however, there is considerable evidence of an equally strong Iranian undercurrent. The social structure of Greater Armenia proper was of the centrifugal, aristocratic type characteristic of the Parthian world and in no way reconcilable with the institutions of the city-states of the classical pattern. Urban foundations seem to have remained alien to the Armenian tradition and, whatever its exact site, the new capital lay unquestionably outside the Armenian plateau. Side by side with Tigranakert's classical structures lay a hunting preserve or "paradise" (Arm., Ir. *partez)* of the precise type enjoyed by the Arsacid nobility for its favorite pastime of the hunt, and subsequently recorded repeatedly in Armenia (Appian, *Mithr.,* 12.84; Garsoïan, 1984-85; idem, 1988-89). The best illustration of the twofold cultural tradition of Tigranid Armenia is furnished by the king's famous tetradrachms celebrating the taking of Antioch. Their legend is written in Greek, and their typology, characterized by the royal portrait on the obverse and the standard representation of the captured city on the reverse, is unmistakably Hellenistic. But both the royal title of "king of kings" and Tigran's pearl-edged tiara adorned with the star of divinity belong exclusively to the Iranian world. The continuous duality of this cultural pattern suggests that the philhellenism of the Armenian court had shallower roots than has customarily been hypothesized. We have no evidence that it spread to the rest of the country, and the Romans themselves invariably portrayed Tigran with hostility as an

alien, haughty, and arrogant Oriental monarch.

The empire of Tigran II was far too diversified and fragile to be viable in the face of a major attack. It was created in the period in which Rome was distracted by the civil war at home between Marius and Sulla. But his encroachment on Roman interests in Cappadocia and Cilicia and his links with Mithradates of Pontus could be seen only as a threat. Manandian is of the opinion that, whatever his relations with his father-in-law, Tigran II was not embroiled in the first Mithridatic war of 88-84 BCE, as has usually been argued (Manandian, 1963 [1940], pp. 31-39), and he apparently sought to avoid a direct confrontation with the Romans during the first half of his reign. Even when the Third Mithridatic war began soon after the death of Sulla, Tigran sought to maintain his neutrality, despite the appeal of Mithradates (Manandian, 1963 [1940], pp. 65-74), but he gave refuge to his father-in-law upon his defeat in 71 BCE and refused to surrender him to the Romans despite the offensive demands of the embassy of Appius Claudius in 70 (Appian, *Mithr.* 12.82,84; Plutarch, *Luc.* 19.2; 21.1-2, 7-9).

The first surprise attack of Lucullus against Tigran lI the following year reached across Sophene directly to Tigranakert, from which Tigran withdrew after a major defeat outside the city. Betrayed by its disaffected Greek mercenaries, the capital finally fell after a long siege, yielding an enormous booty to the Romans. The city was sacked, and its inhabitants were sent back to their homes (Strabo, 11.15; 12.2.9; Plutarch, *Luc.* 29; Appian, *Mithr.* 12.86). The capture of Tigranakert marked the beginning of the disaggregation of Tigran's empire, as his southern conquests had already begun to fall away in the face of the Roman advance (Plutarch, *Luc.,* 29.6; Cicero, *De imp. Pomp.* 9.23), but not its complete dismantlement. The alliance with Mithradates of Pontus was maintained; Lucullus's army, harried by guerillas, insufficiently supplied, and unaccustomed to the rigor of the Armenian winter, mutinied and failed to reach the old northern capital of Artašat (Plutarch, *Luc.* 32.1-2, 34.5; Cicero, *De imp. Pomp.* 9.23-24). Complete victory had not been achieved when Lucullus was recalled to Rome in 67 BCE.

The end of the war with Lucullus provided Tigran II with no more than a breathing space, as Rome's imperialist policy hardened and the new *lex Manilia* gave extraordinary powers to Pompey in the East (Cicero, *Pro leg. Man.).* The first blow in 66 fell on Mithradates, who fled northward. But Tigran found himself threatened on two fronts, as the Parthian king Phraates III (r. 71-58), solicited by his son-in-law, Tigran's homonymous son, attacked him

from the east. The Parthian king withdrew after failing to take Artašat, but the younger Tigran now turned for help to Pompey, whom he led to the Armenian northern capital (CD, 36.5 1). To spare the city from the fate of Tigranakert, Tigran II agreed to make a full personal submission in an interview with Pompey. The peace negotiated between Tigran and Pompey in 66 stripped the Armenian king of all his conquests, even including Sophene, and required him to pay the enormous indemnity of 6,000 talents plus gratuities to the Roman soldiers (Strabo, 14.10; Plutarch, *Pomp.* 33; Appian, *Mithr.* 12.104;CD, 36,52-53). His treacherous son was taken to Rome to figure as a part of Pompey's triumph, despite the intercession of Phraates III *(*Appian*, Mithr*. 12.104-5; Plutarch, *Pomp.* 33-34; CD, 36.53). Even so, the peace of 66 did not prove altogether disastrous for Armenia. Greater Armenia, the native core of Tigran's empire remained untouched, and some territories came to be added in Mesopotamia (CD, 37.5.5).Pompey turned his attention to the north (Plutarch, *Pomp.* 34)and eventually to Syria, which became a Roman province in 60 BCE. Recognized as king and a "Friend and ally of the Roman people" (CD, 36.53.6), Tigran II reigned peacefully some ten more years, protected against Parthian encroachments by the Romans (Appian, *Mithr.*, 12.106, Plutarch, *Pomp.* 39.3; CD, 37.7) and died in extreme old age in 56/55 BCE (Cicero, *Pro Sestio*, 27.59).The integrity of the kingdom of Greater Armenia was preserved for a time, but the dismantlement of Tigran II's empire permanently altered the balance of power in the East by putting an end to the existence of a third major state and thus leaving the empires of Rome and the Parthians face to face.

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