

January 2013

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## Recommended Citation

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## CARACALLA'S ARMENIA<sup>1</sup>

LEE E. PATTERSON

**Abstract:** We are hard pressed to understand the events of Caracalla's Parthian war, including the role Armenia played in the conflict, because of gross inadequacies in our sources. A careful analysis suggests that Caracalla intended to annex Armenia but never saw the project through. His intentions can be gauged by his treatment of Edessa, for whose annexation the evidence is more solid. Caracalla was trying to secure his rear, from Osrhoene to Armenia, in preparation for a full-scale Parthian war. Because the goal of stabilizing Armenia proved elusive, given local hostilities, Caracalla had to scale back his plans.

Modern accounts of Roman and Persian history, some surveys, some more specialized, often claim that Caracalla annexed Armenia as a Roman province around 215.<sup>2</sup> If he did so, he would have been the second of two emperors, after Trajan a century earlier, to attempt to bring Armenia under direct governorship rather than employ it as a client state, as it had usually been since the time of the Roman Republic.<sup>3</sup> This episode, part of the narrative of Caracalla's Parthian War, is very problematic. The

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<sup>1</sup> This piece benefited from information and advice given by James R. Russell, Everett Wheeler, and Andrew C. Johnston, as well as the editors and anonymous referees of *Syllecta Classica*. To them all I express sincere thanks. Responsibility for the final product, including any errors it may contain, rests solely with me.

<sup>2</sup> For example, Cary and Scullard 1976, 497; Bivar 1983, 94; Grant 1996, 32; Laude 2003, 96.

<sup>3</sup> This state of affairs began in earnest in the days of Pompey, but Strabo 11.14.15 provides evidence that the Romans had already brought Armenia into their orbit of vassal states, at least for a time, following the defeat of Antiochus III in 190 BCE. See Patterson 2001; Wheeler 2002, 98.





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entire narrative is encumbered by historiographical difficulties, mainly due to inadequacies in our principal sources, Cassius Dio, Herodian, and the *Historia Augusta* on the classical side and Agathangelos and Moses Khorenats'i on the Armenian. This paper will attempt to sort out these problems, addressing in particular the chronology of Caracalla's Armenian campaign, the identity of the Armenian king he removed from power, and, most importantly, the role Armenia played in Caracalla's greater eastern designs. A proper reassessment of the evidence we have cannot prove that the annexation did not happen, but I hold serious doubts about the historicity of this event. Caracalla did remove an Armenian king, as Trajan had done, but while we have epigraphical and numismatic evidence for the creation of an Armenian province by the latter,<sup>4</sup> such evidence is missing for the former. Why then the claim of annexation made in the aforementioned studies? Without the benefit of detailed analysis of the evidence, one can come away with that impression when we see Caracalla not only removing an Armenian king but annexing nearby Edessa as well, where also a king was removed. It would perhaps be more accurate to say that Caracalla *intended* to annex Armenia, and the example of Edessa may provide his reasons for doing so, to stabilize an important frontier on the eve of a Parthian War and of course, as usual, to enhance the prestige of the emperor. If the former was his objective, it is curious that Caracalla never really succeeded in quelling Armenian hostility, and yet he proceeded with his Parthian War against Artabanus IV in 216 nonetheless. But we will see evidence that this war was not the major undertaking Caracalla had hoped for. As a more subdued affair, it was perhaps the best the emperor could do given his difficulties in Armenia. He had more grandiose plans for the future, but his assassination on 8 April 217 intervened.

Cassius Dio is the most detailed of the sources on Caracalla's Parthian War; he is also, along with Herodian, contemporaneous with Caracalla's reign and an eyewitness to some of the events connected to it.<sup>5</sup> Since the sources are so problematic, we might begin with a basic presentation of the evidence as given in Dio, Herodian, and the *Historia Augusta*, supplemented by tidbits from other classical authors. In the case of Books 76–79 of Dio, we mean more precisely the fragments preserved

<sup>4</sup> *ILS* 1041, 1338; *AE* (1968) No. 510; cf. Dio 68.20.3. Discussion by Millar 1993, 101; Bennett 1997, 194; Chaumont 1976, 138–39; Pflaum 1960, No. 95.

<sup>5</sup> Millar 1964, 18–22.

in the *Excerpta Valesiana*; those preserved in the epitome of Dio by the eleventh century Byzantine monk John Xiphilinus;<sup>6</sup> and, for Book 79, Codex Vaticanus 1288.<sup>7</sup> For the proper context we need to go back to the reign of Caracalla's father Septimius Severus, because of the likelihood that the Armenian king Caracalla will one day remove is the same as Severus' ally in his Parthian wars.

The first of Severus' two wars fell in the early period of his reign (193–195) when he still had Pescennius Niger to contend with as a rival in the East. Herodian tells us that Niger called on help from Armenia, Hatra, and the Parthians as Severus was closing in. While he garnered some support from the latter two, Armenia's king, unnamed by Herodian, declared neutrality (Hdn. 3.1.2). In the end Severus not only overcame Niger but also subdued much of Mesopotamia. The second war (197–199) followed an interval in which Severus was away to meet the challenge of his main foe in the West, Clodius Albinus. It was in this eastern war, Herodian suggests, that Severus initially planned to attack Armenia and instead drew the capitulation of the again unnamed king, who sent money, gifts, and hostages and thereafter became Severus' ally, which evidently was the emperor's plan from the start (κατὰ γνώμην, 3.9.2). Then followed Severus' great successes at Ctesiphon and great disappointments at Hatra. During this campaign Severus was accompanied by the brother of the Parthian king Vologases V (Dio 76.9.3; cf. *HA Sev.* 16.1–6), on whom more will be said later.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>6</sup> A note regarding Cassius Dio: problems with the epitomes of the last twenty books of Dio by Xiphilinus have resulted in editors assigning some material to different books. I follow the numbering of Cary in the Loeb series rather than that of Boissevain's edition, for which one need only subtract 1 from the book numbers given here.

<sup>7</sup> If we have any consolation about the problematic preservation of Dio in these sections, it is that the Codex Vaticanus, despite its many problems, at least "makes clear that the reconstructed text of the other parts of Dio's contemporary history does not grossly misrepresent what he originally wrote" (Millar 1964, 159).

<sup>8</sup> Casual reading of accounts of Parthian history can potentially lead one astray where the numbering of the kings is concerned. For example, Toumanoff 1969 relies on the older system that predates the numismatic work done by Wolski and Le Rider. This work established the most accepted numbering and dates of the last Parthian kings: Vologases IV (147–191), Vologases V (191–208), Vologases VI (208–228), Artabanus IV (ca. 216–224). For further discussion, see Le Rider 1965, 391–95; Sullivan 1990, 455 n. 71 (on the Artabanus sequence) and Le Rider 1965, 174; Wolski 1993, 176

Dio begins his account of Caracalla's eastern campaigns in a way that frustrates efforts to establish a chronology of events. From what we can gather from the preserved fragments, Dio uses several events, whatever their sequence and date, to demonstrate Caracalla's nefarious character: 1) "having tricked" (ἡπατηκῶς) Abgar IX of Edessa by feigning friendship, inviting him to visit the emperor (Dio is vague about where Caracalla is at this point), and then seizing him, Caracalla took direct control over Edessa and Osrhoene (78.12.1). 2) Then Caracalla handled the king of Armenia, here unnamed, in the same way: the king was quarrelling with his sons, Caracalla offered to help resolve the situation, and he lured the king to him and seized him. The Armenians then refused to submit and instead put up a fight (ἐς ὄπλα ἐχώρησαν) (78.12.1). 3) From there Dio moves on to Parthian matters. Caracalla claimed to have engineered a situation that greatly destabilized the Parthian Empire: upon the death of Vologases V, his two sons, Vologases VI and Artabanus IV, began quarrelling over the throne. The emperor wrote to the Senate that the harm to Parthia accruing from this quarrel would benefit Rome. Dio suggests that Caracalla laid claim to what properly should be ascribed to "chance" (τύχην), i.e., that this internal conflict was hardly of Caracalla's making (78.12.2a–3). Dio concludes this section with reminders of Caracalla's vileness with respect to his brother Geta and other familiar crimes.

Following an account of Caracalla's German wars, Dio picks up the eastern thread again: while in winter quarters at Nicomedia, Caracalla ordered the construction of two large "engines" (μηχανήματα) for the forthcoming Parthian and Armenian wars (78.18.1). His pretext for the Parthian conflict was that Vologases VI had refused to surrender two refugees, Tiridates and a Cilician philosopher named Antiochus (78.19.1). Dio does not give us the resolution of this episode until later as he proceeds to present further evidence of Caracalla's villainy. Afterwards, we learn that Vologases surrendered the refugees. Rather than attack Parthia, Caracalla then sent a freedman with a theater background named Theocritus (raised by the emperor to the summit of power: Dio 78.2.2) to lead an army against Armenia. The Armenians proved too much for him (78.21.1). The remainder of Book 78 concerns the infamous slaughter of the people of Alexandria (78.22–24), perhaps a fitting endpiece to a scathing profile.

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n. 1 (on the Vologases). Essential reading for the entire sequence of Parthian coinage is Sellwood 1980.

Book 79 of Dio begins with a new Parthian War. The cause this time involves a marriage proposal. Artabanus IV had refused Caracalla when the latter asked for his daughter's hand.<sup>9</sup> So the emperor invaded Media (Adiabene?), destroyed a number of forts, captured Arbela, and violated the Parthians' royal tombs. Dio admits to treating this campaign lightly, in part because the Parthians offered no resistance, though Caracalla claimed he had defeated them (79.1.1–5). Even so, the Parthians regrouped, with the final confrontation cut off by Caracalla's assassination in 217 (79.3.1,4–5; cf. Eutr. 8.20, Oros. 7.18). It was the alleged mastermind of the plot, the equestrian praetorian prefect Macrinus, who would have to fight the war. Clashing with the Parthians at Nisibis, Macrinus was defeated and forced to offer terms (79.26.2–27.2; cf. Hdn. 4.15.1–9). Concessions to Artabanus were supplemented by concessions to the Armenians, with whom the war previously started (under Theocritus?) was now concluded. Macrinus sent a crown to one Tiridates, who not only became Armenia's new king but also received back booty taken by the Romans and, more importantly, his mother, who had been taken hostage by Caracalla eleven months earlier. Tiridates, moreover, held out hope that he would one day regain territories in Cappadocia once held by his father, as well as receive again the annual payments the Romans had previously paid to Armenia (79.27.4).

This is what we get from the Greek sources. The key missing element, besides good chronological markers, is the name of the Armenian king whose interactions with Severus and Caracalla have punctuated this reconstructed narrative. Can the Armenian tradition help identify this king? The answer, tentatively, is yes; if great care is taken in the use of these sources, we may identify one Chosroes as the king in question. The Armenian historiographical tradition is immensely tortuous, in large part because of the difficulty of identifying some of the main authors and attributing surviving manuscripts to the proper author. Aside from oral material and accounts in Greek, the tradition begins properly after

<sup>9</sup> The story differs somewhat in Herodian, who says that Artabanus, while initially reluctant, finally gave in to Caracalla's persistent entreaties. Caracalla then traveled to the Parthian court and, amid joyous festivities, ordered his men to slaughter the unsuspecting Parthians. Artabanus barely escaped with his life, and war proceeded from there (4.10.5–11.7). There is also a curious episode before this incident in which Caracalla explained to Artabanus in a letter that a marriage would benefit both by uniting the Roman and Parthian empires into a superpower that could conquer all other realms (4.10.2–4). I will have more to say about this episode later on.

the invention of the Armenian alphabet in the early fifth century. Two important works whose origins are difficult to trace are the Gregorian Cycle and the Primary History. The former manifests, in one form, as the author known to us as Agathangelos, whose Armenian work (Aa) has been dated to ca. 460 while a Greek translation (Ag) dates possibly to within a decade.<sup>10</sup> The Primary History was likely composed in the early fifth century and preserved much older material. Both traditions were significant sources for one of the most important, if enigmatic, Armenian historians, Moses Khorenats'i (eighth century?).<sup>11</sup>

The principal difficulty with using Agathangelos and Moses is their tendency to telescope events, providing a simpler narrative for their audience but causing considerable frustration for modern scholars. Thus, in Moses we have three kings spanning a 124-year period: Vologases (Valarsh), Chosroes (Khosrov), and Tiridates the Great (Trdat), the first Christian king of Armenia and the hero of so much of the tradition preceding Moses. This range is similar to the 121 years for these kings in the Primary History.<sup>12</sup> Such a range is not impossible, but one suspects telescoping due to the inordinate lengths of reign required to fill it. Moreover, building on work done by Hakob Manandian and Paolo Ananian,<sup>13</sup> Cyril Toumanoff discovered patterns in the Armenian sources that suggest not one but two kings named Chosroes and two (or possibly three) named Tiridates in this period.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Toumanoff 1963, 16; Toumanoff 1969, 235 n. 13; cf. Thomson 1976, xc.

<sup>11</sup> Toumanoff 1963, 304–16; Toumanoff 1969, 235; Thomson 1978, 54. The eighth century date for Moses is controversial. Moses claimed to have been a disciple of the monk Mesrop, the inventor of the Armenian alphabet (3.61), but some scholars insist that he is taking on a fifth-century persona and date him instead to the eighth century. For the fifth-century dating, see Traina 1995, Sarkissian 1991, 58–89. For the eighth-century dating, see Thomson 1978, 58–61; Thomson 2004, 215.

<sup>12</sup> This section of the Primary History may be found in the Appendix of Thomson's 1978 translation of Moses.

<sup>13</sup> Manandian 1957; Ananian 1961.

<sup>14</sup> Toumanoff 1969, 237–38 refers to a 145-year period, which seems to be based on his calculations of regnal periods relative to known external events: 180–325 CE. But the regnal years given in Moses clearly add to 124: Vologases, 20 years (2.65); Chosroes, 48 years (2.74); and Tiridates, 56 years (2.92).

Moses Khorenats'i says that Caracalla waged war against the Parthian king Valarsh, that is Vologases VI, and in this conflict Chosroes remained neutral (2.75). Agathangelos and Moses attribute to Chosroes a war against the Sasanian king Ardashir when the latter overthrew the last Parthian king Artavan, that is Artabanus IV (Aa 18, Moses 2.71). Chosroes' connection to the Parthian king was that "he was second in the kingdom of the Persians [i.e., the Parthians], for whoever was king of Armenia had second rank in the Persian kingdom" (Aa 18).<sup>15</sup> In the Greek translation of Agathangelos, Chosroes is said to be the brother of Artabanus (Ag 9–10). This war saw great success, with the Sasanian army devastated by the Armenians (Aa 23, Moses 2.72). Chosroes, however, was assassinated by a Parthian named Anak, in the employ of Ardashir (Aa 32, Moses 2.74),<sup>16</sup> and the Sasanians subsequently invaded Armenia. It was from this invasion that Chosroes' infant son Tiridates was whisked away into Roman territory (Aa 36, Moses 2.76), later to return to Armenia and fight his own Sasanian war as Tiridates IV (Aa 132, Moses 2.82). This is the Tiridates who will eventually become Armenia's first Christian king.

This Tiridates is problematic because his reign is contemporaneous with those of Diocletian and Constantine.<sup>17</sup> Since the Armenian tradition makes him the son of the aforementioned Chosroes (Moses 2.67, Aa 36), whom Moses names as a contemporary of Caracalla, we have a wide discrepancy. To this state of affairs Toumanoff applied the simple corrective of an extra father-son pairing of Chosroes-Tiridates, with the following regnal dates: Chosroes I (191–216), Tiridates II (216–252), Chosroes II (279–287, west Armenia only), Tiridates IV (298–330). We need not rehearse the totality of Toumanoff's findings but instead focus our attention on those matters that bear on Caracalla's Armenian ventures, in particular the career of Chosroes I.

Toumanoff arrived at the start date of Chosroes' reign by calculating the end date of the reign of Vologases of Armenia, whom the Armenian

<sup>15</sup> Translations of the Armenian text of Agathangelos used here are by Robert W. Thomson.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Elishe III, p. 72, where Chosroes was killed by his brothers. See further Toumanoff 1969, 262.

<sup>17</sup> For the details of the chronology of Tiridates' reign, see Toumanoff 1969, 265–73, *contra* Kettenhofen 1995, 92–104. For additional revisions to fourth-century chronology, see Hewsen 1978–1979.



sources universally list as Chosroes' predecessor. This Vologases is presumed to be the usurper who, in 191, minted his own coins at Seleucia and somehow removed Vologases IV from the Parthian throne, now to rule as Vologases V.<sup>18</sup> The relationship of Vologases V to Chosroes is suggested by the Greek Agathangelos (9–10), where Artabanus IV, Vologases' son, is listed as Chosroes' brother. We must assume, of course, that they at least share the same father for Toumanoff's reconstruction to work. When, therefore, his father ascended the Parthian throne, Chosroes naturally inherited the Armenian.<sup>19</sup>

Chosroes, then, was the Armenian king who remained neutral in Severus' conflict with Niger (Hdn. 3.1.2) and became Severus' ally during the emperor's second war in the East (Hdn. 3.9.2).<sup>20</sup> One minor irritant in this reconstruction is Dio's reference to a *brother* of Vologases V as Severus' ally (76.9.3). This is obviously not Chosroes since he was the Great King's son, not his brother, so evidently we have here another relative of Vologases V who allied with Severus. It bears noting that Severus'

<sup>18</sup> Debevoise 1938, 255; McDowell 1935, 198. Wolski 1993, 187 while acknowledging that we lack any written sources for this transition, rejects the usurper theory and regards the younger Vologases as a son and possibly co-regent of the older. For my own part I wonder why Vologases V could not be both son *and* usurper, which was not unheard of in the history of the Arsacid dynasties of Parthia and Armenia. Multiple sons through multiple wives often created dynastic difficulties for Parthian royalty, as noted, for example, by Hartmann 2009, 257. Moreover, we shall consider evidence that Chosroes went to war against his own father in support of Severus and was later in conflict with his own sons in Armenia.

<sup>19</sup> Toumanoff 1969, 242–43.

<sup>20</sup> One more piece of evidence has been cited to support this association of Chosroes with Severus, though in the end it does not add anything useful. An inscription found in Egyptian Thebes attests to the presence of an Armenian Chosroes (Χοσροῆς Ἀρμένιος ἰδὼν ἐθαύμασα, *CIG* III.4821). Since Severus is known to have visited Egypt and traveled up the Nile in 200 (Dio 76.13.1–2, *HA Sev.* 17.1–4), there is a common assumption that this inscription must refer to Chosroes I of Armenia, thus Letronne 1848, 311; Gutschmid 1892, 405; Asdourian 1911, 117n. 3; Toumanoff 1969, 245; Schottky 1994, 230. However, Chaumont 1976, 159 n. 492 astutely notes that the name “Chosroes” was widespread in the Iranian region and that there is no reason to assume that this must be Chosroes I, as opposed to any Armenian named Chosroes who was in the service of the Romans, especially given that there is no date for this inscription.



war does not feature in the Armenian sources, so we should not be surprised to see no reference to this Parthian royal if he was never an Armenian king. I am aware of no other reference to this mysterious brother, nor is Udo Hartmann, who conjectures, not unreasonably, that he may have been a son of Vologases IV who had been denied the throne, then unsuccessfully revolted against his brother, and was now allied to his brother's enemy. As Hartmann notes (see also note 18 above), this was a recurring problem in Parthian politics when multiple wives gave rise to multiple claimants to a Parthian king's throne.<sup>21</sup>

Toumanoff's reconstruction rests partly on chronology, as explained above, and partly on a narrative pattern in Agathangelos. Chosroes' fight with Vologases (as ally of Severus) made its way into Agathangelos in the form of a fight with Ardashir (an invasion of Persian territory either way) (Aa 1–2, Ag 9–15), naturally enough given that Chosroes was Artabanus' brother and he would want to avenge him on the Sasanian king.<sup>22</sup> But, says Toumanoff, this venture has been confused with Tiridates II's alliance with Severus Alexander during his war with Ardashir in 232, as well as Chosroes II's alliance with Carus during his conflict with Bahram II in 283,<sup>23</sup> the failure of which eventually led to the death of Chosroes II at the hands of Anak, as described above.

Toumanoff's reconstruction has received wide acceptance.<sup>24</sup> We have seen how it accounts for the beginning of Chosroes' reign. The end of the reign comes at the hands of Caracalla, as we saw in our survey of sources above. We are now ready to begin a proper assessment of the chronology of Caracalla's eastern wars and the emperor's intentions toward Armenia. In fact, the former helps us to do the latter.

The key passage is Cassius Dio 78.12.1. This section contains both accounts of dethronement, the removal of Abgar IX of Edessa and that of the Armenian king we have identified as Chosroes I. We saw above that

<sup>21</sup> Hartmann 2009, 257–61.

<sup>22</sup> Toumanoff 1969, 244.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 259–61.

<sup>24</sup> For example, Garsoïan 2004, 72–75; Redgate 2000, 94; Schottky 1994, 230. Robert Hewsen 1978–1979, 100 credits the work of Manandian, Ananian, and Toumanoff for “successfully clearing the mists which for so long obscured the chronology of this dynasty for the third century A.D.” However, these scholars' reconstructions of the late third and early fourth centuries, involving the conversion of Tiridates IV and the career of Gregory the Illuminator, have found less favor with Kettenhofen 1995, 92–104.

the passage lies at the beginning of Dio's treatment of Caracalla's wars. Along with a notice of Caracalla's desire to destabilize Parthia politically (78.12.2a–3), these incidents begin the process of characterizing Caracalla as vile and treacherous in his dealings with foreigners. Dio then moves on to other matters, such as the German wars, before returning to the East in 78.18. Toumanoff has argued that this set-up could easily lead one astray by suggesting that the matters involving Abgar and Chosroes are closely related. Their placement in this sort of prologue does not indicate their chronological position but merely illustrates Caracalla's character.<sup>25</sup> From this perfectly reasonable proposition, Toumanoff proceeds with his version of the chronology.

Toumanoff argues that Theocritus' expedition happened in 215 immediately after Vologases VI (whom he refers to as Vologases V) had surrendered the hostages Caracalla had demanded, thus removing a *casus belli* in Parthia (as suggested by Dio 78.21.1). Toumanoff feels that Chosroes' relations with "his Iranian brothers" (the Parthian Arsacids) may have warmed after Severus' 197–199 war and that, after war with Vologases was averted, Caracalla felt that "Armenia had to be punished, and an expedition under the command of Theocritus was dispatched there, but was beaten off. A peace of sorts must have followed then (215)."<sup>26</sup> None of this is attested in the sources, nor do I see any logical reason to embrace these conjectures. Dio merely positions Theocritus' invasion immediately after Caracalla's resolution with Vologases. It is true that the *Historia Augusta* refers to this war as the "*bellum Armeniacum Parthicumque*" (*HA Car.* 6.1), implying that Caracalla saw the two as a common enemy and suggesting a connection between them in his motivation to wage war.<sup>27</sup> I believe there may indeed have been a connection, but that link had more to do with strategic considerations, as discussed below, than with the punitive mindset Toumanoff ascribes to Caracalla.

<sup>25</sup> Toumanoff 1969, 245–46. Among those supposedly led astray by this schema are Magie 1950, 685 and Debevoise 1938, 262–63.

<sup>26</sup> Toumanoff 1969, 247. Asdourian 1911, 118 also places Theocritus' expedition in 215.

<sup>27</sup> Chaumont 1976, 155 similarly suggests that an Armenian revolt (based on a chronology different from Toumanoff's) and the issue with Vologases may have been motives of equal weight for Caracalla.

As for the removal of the kings of Edessa and Armenia, Rohden and Gutschmid both saw them as closely linked, again as suggested by Dio, and dated these events to 216. The linchpin was Dio 79.27.4, in which Macrinus, following his Parthian defeat, enthroned Tiridates II as king of Armenia and released his mother, whom Caracalla had held in prison for eleven months. Counting eleven months back from the death of Caracalla on 8 April 217, we get May 216, which is also Toumanoff's proposed date for the removal of Chosroes.<sup>28</sup> This evidence of the eleven month period is useful only if Chosroes and his wife were captured at the same time. It is certainly tempting to make that assumption, but the synchronization becomes problematic in the face of other evidence.

The alternative chronology is essentially that of André Maricq, which sees both dethronements as preceding all the other events of the eastern wars. Maricq, followed by Chaumont and Kettenhofen, argues that Caracalla's invitation to Abgar happened while he was still in Rome in 212 or 213. He cites a papyrus from Dura-Europos (*P. Dura* 28) published by Bellinger and Welles that contains a bill of sale. Quadruple dated to 243, the papyrus indicates that Edessa had been a Roman colony since 213/4, and further numismatic evidence suggests January 214, giving us our *terminus ante quem* for the removal of Abgar.<sup>29</sup> We might now revise this date to 212/3 given the additional evidence of Syriac documents from nearby Beth Phouraia, also dated with respect to the end of Abgar's reign.<sup>30</sup> Maricq then tentatively assigns the Armenian incident to early 214, not merely on the basis of its juxtaposition with the Edessan in Dio's text (78.21.1) but also on an interpretation of Dio 79.27.4, which references the capture of Chosroes' presumed wife. Maricq joins other scholars in synchronizing the capture of Chosroes and his wife and

<sup>28</sup> Toumanoff 1969, 249; Rohden 1896, cols. 2447–50; Gutschmid 1887, 36–37. Toumanoff further argues that Caracalla's overtures to Chosroes could only have been made after the aforementioned peace of 215. As argued above, we can reasonably reject the suggestion of such a peace as fantasy.

<sup>29</sup> Maricq 1957, 298, after Bellinger and Welles 1935, 142–54. Cf. Kettenhofen 1990, 790; Chaumont 1976, 154.

<sup>30</sup> Ross 2001, 58–59. He further cautions that this need not be the actual date Edessa became a Roman *colonia* but rather the beginning of a process that resulted in that designation during the reign of Elagabalus (218–222) and then the higher status of *metropolis* under Severus Alexander (222–235). For detailed analysis of these documents, see Millar 1993, 476–81.

argues that this precipitated the Armenian uprising, which Theocritus' expedition in 215 failed to quell.

However, given his 214 date, for this synchronization to work Maricq must move the queen's eleven months to an earlier period. His argument is that the eleven months merely designate the severe nature of her treatment, not that they date to the last eleven months of Caracalla's reign. So when Macrinus restored her, she in fact had been in Roman custody for much longer, but under better circumstances after the initial eleven months; her turn of fortune came upon the death of her husband Chosroes.<sup>31</sup> In the end, I see this as reading too much into Dio, who simply says at 79.27.4 that Caracalla had held her for eleven months. Aside from the fact that we can only assume Tiridates II's father was Chosroes, though it seems very likely, we also have no idea when Chosroes died.<sup>32</sup> I think the path of least resistance is simply to assume her capture and Chosroes' did not occur at the same time.

Looking at the chronologies of Toumanoff, Maricq, and others, I come away with the impression that they have failed to see the forest for the trees. Pinpointing the removal of Chosroes, the capture of his wife, and the expedition of Theocritus can leave one with a disjointed

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<sup>31</sup> Maricq 1957, 299–300.

<sup>32</sup> Toumanoff 1969, 245–46, 249 makes two arguments to promote Chosroes as Tiridates II's father. The first assumes that the Tiridates who had fled to Parthia and then was handed back to Caracalla by Vologases VI, according to Dio 78.19.1, could be "safely assumed" to be an Armenian prince, indeed one of the hostages who "must quite obviously" have been surrendered by Chosroes to Severus under the terms of their agreement in the 197–199 war. Herodian (3.9.2) attests to this alliance, but says nothing about the terms, nor do we have any evidence for the identity of the hostage. Moreover, Chaumont 1976, 155 cautions about this association, given the frequency of the name Tiridates. For his second argument, Toumanoff cites Dio 79.27.4 and then argues that the absence of Chosroes in the diplomacy between Macrinus and Tiridates in 217 means Chosroes was dead by then. Dio says Tiridates hoped Macrinus would restore to him territories in Cappadocia once held by his father and also hoped for the resumption of the annual payments the Romans had previously paid to Armenia. Toumanoff assumes that these arrangements were made when Chosroes became Severus' ally in the emperor's second Parthian war. But again we have none of this in Herodian, nor do I know of any other source on this. Incidentally, almost no one seems to have noted the oddity of an Armenian king requesting the restoration of land to the west of the Euphrates in Roman territory. Wheeler 2002, 119 persuasively argues that by "Cappadocia" Dio at 79.27.4 really means "Sophene," as is also the case at 58.26.1.

narrative, so that, for example, we find ourselves wondering if Theocritus' attack should be attached to the Armenian uprising that followed Chosroes' capture (Dio 78.12.1) or explained as a substitute for the aborted war with Vologases (Dio 78.21.1). As an alternative, rather than speaking in the plural, I propose we speak of a single Armenian war, from 212/3, the capture of Chosroes, to autumn 217, the period of Macrinus' diplomacy with Tiridates, which is not to say continuous fighting given the usual seasonal abatements.<sup>33</sup>

First of all, Dio 79.27.4 refers to the war that ended in the diplomacy of Macrinus and Tiridates as "aforementioned" (ὡς περ εἶπον). He can only mean the conflict of Caracalla's reign. Secondly, with regard to Chosroes' wife, if we return to the earlier calculation, counting eleven months prior to Caracalla's death on 8 April 217, we again find ourselves in May 216, when it is certainly plausible that Roman hostilities in Armenia are still ongoing. Therefore, we do not need Maricq's overextended logic. As for Theocritus, we cannot definitely pin down the timing of his attack, but there is evidence providing for the possibility of 216 or 217. At 78.21.4, Dio indicates that Theocritus had the procurator of Alexandria Flavius Titianus executed for a personal slight (given Theocritus' background as a dancer). Immediately following this is the account of Caracalla's massacre of the Alexandrians (78.22–23). These sections come from the same fragment in Xiphilinus (336.3–337.9) and give confidence that they happen during the same visit. We can date this visit with the help of a papyrus, recording a requisition of camels

<sup>33</sup> Of course, this war was closely linked to the greater Parthian war, whose dimensions are even more unclear. We have specifics on the end of the war (under Macrinus), but no evidence points to Caracalla's initial motivation and planning. We might conjecture that he was inspired by the quarrel between Vologases VI and Artabanus IV that followed the death of Vologases V in 208. As noted above, at 78.12.2a (a fragment from the *Excerpta Valesiana*), Dio charged Caracalla with taking credit for this conflict as a way of promoting his strategic prowess. At 78.12.3 (from Xiphilinus), Caracalla boasted to the Senate how his achievement would harm Parthia and, by implication, benefit Rome. Reading between Dio's fragments, one is tempted to see his accusations in the context of the war that eventually followed. Caracalla may have seen an opportunity to take advantage of the internal instability that resulted from the brothers' conflict and begun planning a Parthian war, perhaps after he had finished other business (his father's British war and the removal of Geta as co-emperor) and had assumed sole power in 211. We might also consider his boast to the Senate in light of other evidence involving his alleged emulation of Alexander the Great, which is discussed below.

for Caracalla (*BGUI.266*). As Maricq has shown, from this document we learn that Caracalla had left Egypt no earlier than January 216.<sup>34</sup> He then went to Antioch, where his presence is epigraphically attested on 27 May 216 (*SEG XVII.759*): this to be the launching point of his war against Artabanus. The only thing this evidence cannot tell us is whether Theocritus' venture predates or postdates his visit to Alexandria, but one suspects that he found less favor with Caracalla after his defeat in Armenia, if he survived at all, whereas Dio described the arrogance he displays in Alexandria to demonstrate his unassailable position in Caracalla's court. That would increase the likelihood that Theocritus' expedition should be dated to 216 or 217, three to five years after the removal of Chosroes but still responding to the situation that began when the Armenians first "took up arms" (ἐς ὄπλα ἐχώρησαν) (78.12.1).

In any case, if we are to treat the capture of Abgar and Chosroes as closely related events, since Maricq's argument has proven inadequate, we must find another basis. The answer to me lies in Caracalla's strategic plans for Edessa and Armenia. I argue that the parallels that can be discerned between the two, that both kings are removed amid local difficulties, can be extrapolated to additional parallels. While individual motives should never be discounted, we will profit from looking at the broader context in which Caracalla's strategic decisions were made. That requires a brief review of the role of Armenia and northern Mesopotamia in the Romans' strategic calculations vis-à-vis the Parthians since the time of Trajan, who broke new ground by annexing Armenia for the first (and probably only<sup>35</sup>) time. In fact, we should hardly be surprised

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<sup>34</sup> Maricq 1957, 301–02.

<sup>35</sup> Unless one counts the alleged annexation of Armenia by Marc Antony. It is true that Antony removed Artavasdes in 34 (Dio 49.39.5–6, Plut. *Ant.* 50.4, Tac. *Ann.* 2.3), as Trajan and Caracalla would the kings of their day, and garrisoned Armenia the following year (Dio 49.40.1). But no evidence supports the incorporation of Armenia as a province. In the infamous Donations of Alexandria, Antony declared Armenia essentially a client state to be ruled by his and Cleopatra's son Alexander (Dio 49.41.3, Plut. *Ant.* 54.4). Whatever we make of the Donations, the evidence suggests that the occupation was little more than a two-year raiding expedition (Dio 49.39.5–6, Pliny *HN* 33.82–83, Oros. *Adv. Pag.* 6.19.3), as argued by Chaumont 1986, 137. Moreover, Sherwin-White 1984, 321 not unreasonably expresses doubt that Antony possessed sufficient foresight and acumen to arrange for Armenia's incorporation as a province. See now Patterson forthcoming.

that Armenia and northern Mesopotamia, including Osroene, were repeatedly linked in Rome's military ventures on the Parthian front. "The position of Osroene on one of the northward routes out of Mesopotamia meant that Edessa also played a part in the history of Armenia and in the conflicts over it, and that Edessa's fate was sometimes tied to that of its northern neighbor."<sup>36</sup>

In fact, this state of affairs held true for both sides. The two regions were also bound in the designs of the Parthians, along with Adiabene, together forming a frontier intended to provide Parthian security.<sup>37</sup> More than that, the Parthians considered Armenia an integral part of their realm, both politically and culturally, a view shared by the Armenians themselves, in part because the same family (the Arsacids, albeit different branches) ruled both realms.<sup>38</sup> We have seen above that Agathangelos considered Armenia's king to be of "second rank in the Persian kingdom" (Aa 18), one step removed from the Parthian throne, as shown, for example, by the accession of Vologases V in 191, even though one might justifiably suspect the Armenian writer of inflating the importance of his homeland in the Persian world.

Before we begin the survey of Caracalla's predecessors, a few preliminary remarks are necessary for us to see the decisions of these emperors, including Caracalla, with the proper perspective. We need clarity on two basic concepts that inform the arguments presented below: strategy and borders. In referring to "strategic decisions," I do not mean to suggest that Trajan, Caracalla, and the Romans in general had a concept of a "grand strategy" as Luttwak defines it, with a coherent procedure, or "system," designed to address specific circumstances across the entirety of the Roman Empire.<sup>39</sup> C. R. Whittaker's formulation is more useful for understanding how the emperors understood their strategic decisions. "Strategy" is the correct word, but it was a strategy based on *ideology*, on

<sup>36</sup> Ross 2001, 20. This proximity also prompted Moses Khorenats'i to construct links among royal families of Edessa, Armenia, and Adiabene "in his desire to give an early pedigree to the Armenian church" (Ross 2001, 165 n. 19).

<sup>37</sup> Dabrowa 1984, 161–62.

<sup>38</sup> Garsoïan 1985, X 6–9; Kennedy 1996, 73, 81; Campbell 1993, 225; cf. Isaac 1993, 31–32.

<sup>39</sup> Luttwak 1976, 3–5.



the idea of expanding the Roman Empire and, consequently, furthering the glory of the emperor, or, as the situation warranted, eliminating a threat to that expansion.<sup>40</sup> Certainly the Parthians periodically posed such a threat, especially when they interfered with Armenia.

This concept of strategy was partially informed by how the Romans conceived of borders. With these matters we enter a controversy that has swept studies of the Roman Near East with a certain measure of polemical flourish and excess emotion. This is not the place to rehearse the debates in their full complexity, but I offer here a few points that I hope will bolster my arguments about Caracalla below. Either-or thinking often muddles the reality, as when we should decide that rivers and walls are either lines where the Roman Empire stopped or zones that enabled the extension of the Roman presence beyond directly administered provinces. Certainly, it is fair to think of "borders" as zones of influence that facilitated movements of traders, religious pilgrims, and others, as well as movements of military supplies, information, and ultimately armies, allowing the emperors to pursue their strategic goals. But defense of the empire in its various sectors was also a goal, one that acknowledged real threats from external enemies, such as the Parthians, hence the view of borders as barriers as the occasion warranted. Another goal was the exercise of sovereignty over subject territories, states that were clients at Rome's discretion.<sup>41</sup> This was an extension of Roman *imperium* in the sense that clients, such as the kings of Armenia and Edessa, were expected to enforce Roman policy. Obviously, when that solution proved inadequate or unsatisfactory, an emperor had recourse to direct annexation, as Trajan in Armenia.<sup>42</sup> Ultimately, such zones enabled their own extension, for example, from the forts along the Euphrates to

<sup>40</sup> Whittaker 2004, 34–37.

<sup>41</sup> The supposedly anti-Luttwak and anti-strategy wing includes Whittaker 1994, 54–59; Millar 1993, 439; Isaac 1993, 42, 103, 141, although this characterization by Wheeler is, in my view, somewhat excessive. For instance, as I noted above, Whittaker hardly denies a concept of strategy to the Romans. Nonetheless, for a forceful argument in favor of defensive borders, systematic application of frontier strategy, and real threats from the Parthians, see Wheeler 1993a, 1993b, and 2007.

<sup>42</sup> Specifically with reference to Armenia, Whittaker notes, "all future emperors [after Augustus] regarded the country as a Roman 'gift,' revocable at any time. It was a Roman right to install and control the kings of Armenia, a right they were prepared to enforce with arms" (1994, 54).



Nisibis to Hatra. This seems to have been how some militant emperors intended to expand the empire, though to what extent and at what cost to the Parthians remains unknown.

The mental framework outlined above no doubt goes a long way to answering the vexing question of why Trajan turned Armenia into a Roman province, one of the highlights of his Parthian war, which followed a Parthian attempt to install Parthamasiris, nephew of King Osroes, on the Armenian throne (Dio 68.19–20, Eutr. 8.3.2). While Dio was undoubtedly correct in ascribing to Trajan the motivation of glory-seeking in his eastern campaigns (68.17.1, 68.29.1), having Armenia secure in his rear as he pursued his Parthian war also showed strategic considerations. To this region was added northern Mesopotamia as another important component in his strategy. Since his occupation of Armenia had greatly extended the Roman lines eastward, the addition of Mesopotamia removed a dangerous flank exposed to the Parthians.<sup>43</sup>

Ultimately, the glory that accrued from extending the Roman *imperium* to beyond the Euphrates proved to be an inspiration to later emperors,<sup>44</sup> who did not share Hadrian's strategic sense when he had withdrawn from Trajan's eastern provinces. Among them was Lucius Verus, whose own Parthian war in 161–169 resulted in the placement of a Roman nominee, Sohaemus, on the Armenian throne by his general Statius Priscus in 163 (Fronto *Epist.* 2.1.15, Dio 71.3.1, *HA Marcus* 9.1, *HA Verus* 7.1), as well as an occupation of northern Mesopotamia, complete with forts and garrisons and the appropriation of Nisibis, but not provincial annexation (Dio 71.2.1–3, Lucian *Hist. Conscr.* 15, 19). While the extent of occupation of this territory is not clear, we can at least point to the establishment of Osrhoene as a client kingdom in 165 (Proc. *Pers.* 2.12.29), which may have served to bolster the defense of Armenia as Verus' general Avidius Cassius pushed forward all the way to Ctesiphon.<sup>45</sup>

The area of indirect control established by Verus eventually became a formal Roman province under Septimius Severus, during his second Parthian war, designated as "Mesopotamia" and garrisoned with two

<sup>43</sup> Ross 2001, 31; Luttwak 1976, 108; Lepper 1948, 139–40.

<sup>44</sup> Edwell 2008, 22.

<sup>45</sup> Ross 2001, 38; Kennedy 1987, 57; cf. Millar 1993, 113; Edwell 2008, 213n. 96.

newly-created legions, I and III Parthica.<sup>46</sup> This province lay to the east of the one called "Osrhoene," created during Severus' first war. The latter province comprised a large portion of the former kingdom. Ruled by Abgar VIII from Edessa, Osrhoene had nominally been a Roman client but now, in 195, was joining with Adiabene and Hatra in attacking Nisibis, possibly in support of Severus' rival Niger, though this is by no means clear. Despite this aggression, Severus did not remove Abgar but merely reduced his kingdom to Edessa and its environs. Given his continued difficulties with Niger, he may have felt Abgar would be useful as a client king once again.<sup>47</sup> In any case, with Armenia also firmly in the Roman orbit, as we saw earlier (Hdn. 3.9.2), Severus was able to embark on his ambitious attack on Ctesiphon in southern Mesopotamia. Moreover, he supposedly noted that the addition of Osrhoene and Mesopotamia would create a "bulwark" for Syria, of which Dio is critical as he points out that such conquests overextended the empire without sufficient benefit (75.3.2–3). This falls in line with his recurring charge that these emperors were more interested in glory than in any practical benefits from their eastern conquests (of which Severus is accused at 75.1.1). In addition to any concerns about Syria, Ross proposes that Severus' intention with his new provinces was also "to cut off Armenia from Parthia."<sup>48</sup>

So clearly, for Caracalla's predecessors, Armenia and Osrhoene worked together for the furtherance of their agenda: security of the frontier 1) to facilitate the expansion of the empire at the Parthians' expense and 2) at least as important if not more so, to enhance the prestige of the emperor. What motivated Caracalla to remove the son of Severus' ally has drawn a variety of responses. Abgar IX, also known

<sup>46</sup> Edwell 2008, 28; Millar 1993, 125–26; Kennedy 1979.

<sup>47</sup> The establishment of Osrhoene as a province is well attested, e.g., *ILS* 1353, *CIL* XII.1856, *AE* (1984) 919. For further discussion of the evidence, see Edwell 2008, 215 n.116; Speidel 2007; Millar 1993, 125; Wagner 1983, 106–12; Kennedy 1979; Magie 1950, 1543–44 n. 26. In his analysis of epigraphical evidence and local topography, Gawlikowski 1998, 423 proposes that the province was not carved out of Abgar's kingdom but possibly from neighboring territories, *contra* Speidel 2007, 422–23. For discussion of the affair in 195, including an assessment of why Severus maintained Abgar as a client king in the little niche not annexed, see Ross 2001, 46–53.

<sup>48</sup> Ross 2001, 20.

as Abgar Severus, had not been on the throne very long when Caracalla put an end to his kingdom in 212/3, perhaps two years. At 78.12.1a, Dio says that Abgar was being cruel to the leaders of kindred tribes by ostensibly forcing them to adopt Roman customs but in reality subjugating them to his authority. Ross has posited that Abgar may have wanted to find favor with the Romans and used harsh methods to enforce the Roman practice of controlling and taxing the subject populations, methods to which his more experienced father had not resorted. In the process, he tried to aggrandize his own position and ran afoul of the aforementioned leaders, whose resistance destabilized the region. Ross further conjectures that a mandate to reorganize the tribes may have come from Caracalla as a way of enforcing the newly enacted *constitutio Antoniniana*, the famous decree bestowing citizenship on all inhabitants of the Roman Empire, which Dio claims was intended to increase the tax base (78.9.5). This instability was unacceptable to Caracalla as he planned his Parthian war, and he resorted to direct Roman rule by attaching Edessa to Osrhoene, thereby re-establishing order as well as perhaps implementing direct control of his taxation policy.<sup>49</sup> This was the occasion, as Dio says (78.12.1), for the trickery Caracalla employed when he lured Abgar away from Edessa (presumably while the emperor was still in Rome, as we saw above) and imprisoned him.<sup>50</sup>

Given the chance, Caracalla would have likely followed his removal of Chosroes with the same sort of provincial rule. We have no details about the conflict Chosroes was having with his sons, but it would not be surprising to find that such conflicts destabilized Armenia in the same way as Abgar's excesses at Edessa. Capturing Chosroes resulted in further and perhaps more widespread turmoil, for the suppression of which Caracalla sent Theocritus, probably in 216. The latter's failure delayed what was likely a planned annexation, whose purpose was the same for Caracalla's war against Artabanus that it had been in previous wars. One

<sup>49</sup> Ross 2001, 61–64; cf. Millar 1993, 144.

<sup>50</sup> Laude 2003, 96 suggests as an additional possibility that Abgar's enforcement of Roman customs meant that he, as a pagan king, was actually trying to suppress Christianity. Since the nobility in Osrhoene were overwhelmingly Christian, the destabilizing effects were widespread, forcing Caracalla to act. Whatever the merits of this supposition, we can at least say that there was likely a Christian presence in Osrhoene by this time, though the evidence remains somewhat uncertain. See further Millar 1993, 463–66, 473–76.

might further note that the pattern of his predecessors may also provide a hint of what Caracalla would have done. In the previous three wars the only time an Armenian king was removed was when the emperor wanted to create a province, thus Trajan to Parthamasiris. On the other occasions, Armenia served its function as a client state, as when Verus installed a king (Sohaemus) and Septimius Severus confirmed a king as an ally (Chosroes). We should fully expect, therefore, that Caracalla would have followed Trajan's lead the rest of the way.

The "strategy," then, that we can likely attribute to Caracalla was a stable frontier in support of the achievement of utmost glory. While we will never know if Caracalla saw the end result as the annexation of the Parthian Empire itself, the establishment of a pro-Roman Parthian client king (as Trajan had done), or simply a good sack of Ctesiphon (achieved by Verus and Severus), one clue we have about his intentions lies in the tradition of his so-called *imitatio Alexandri*. The consensus in modern scholarship is that Caracalla's Parthian wars, both planned and undertaken, answered his need to achieve military success on par with Alexander the Great.<sup>51</sup> This line follows the motivation ascribed to him by Dio, that Caracalla supposedly wrote to the Senate and, accounting for his eastern victories, claimed to be Alexander reborn (78.7.2), which reflects a broader tradition recorded by Dio and Herodian of Caracalla's obsession with Alexander.<sup>52</sup>

The strange incident involving Caracalla's petition to marry Artabanus' daughter has been explained by Vogt as an example of this *imitatio Alexandri*, given that Alexander himself had married daughters of

<sup>51</sup> Millar 1993, 142–43, 1964, 151; Dabrowa 1984, 158; Chaumont 1976, 154; Ceaușescu 1974, 166; Vogt 1969, 307; Magie 1950, 683. Levick 1969 has suggested that Caracalla's route through Asia Minor in 214 was intended to cover some of the places Alexander had visited. Johnston 1983 disputes some of her epigraphical and numismatic claims, but not, apparently, the overall thesis of Caracalla's Alexander-mania.

<sup>52</sup> Dio 78.7.1–8.3, 78.22.1, 79.19.2; Hdn. 4.8.1–2, 4.8.6–7, 4.9.4. It also falls in line with Caracalla's boast to have engineered the quarrel between Vologases VI and Artabanus IV in a letter to the Senate, where Caracalla took credit for something more properly ascribed to chance, according to Dio 78.12.2a–3. As we have noted above, such quarrels seem to have been a recurring feature of Parthian politics. Moreover, Caracalla may have seen this conflict as an opportunity to launch his Parthian war in the first place (see note 33).

Darius III and Artaxerxes III in an effort to enhance his legitimacy in the Persian Empire, thus relying on more than simple conquest to achieve supreme dominion.<sup>53</sup> If the incident is historical at all and not merely an invention, it is probably best to follow Dio 79.1.1 and Herodian 4.10.1 and see it merely as a pretext for war. But the whole event seems like an odd call for Caracalla, who supposedly, according to Herodian 4.10.2–4, waxed fervent in a letter to Artabanus about a world empire co-ruled by the Romans and Parthians. Timpe is probably right to reject the entire episode as unhistorical.<sup>54</sup> While the virtue of Vogt's thesis is that Caracalla's overture can be explained in the context of his *imitatio Alexandri*, this episode seems to go too far. Alexander's own plans for a world empire are difficult enough to discern. Whether or not Alexander himself was a visionary, do we even need to ask this of Caracalla? His objective was war and glory, nothing more. If his ultimate plan was to extend Roman dominion across the whole Parthian realm, military conquest would have been the method, not a grand design involving marriage, cooperation, and fusion.

It remains to consider one more problem in this analysis. If my interpretation of Caracalla's intentions is correct, why then did he proceed with an attack on Artabanus' territory when Armenian hostility clearly had not been suppressed? The answer may lie in a clue at Dio 79.1.1–5, where he says that in Adiabene Caracalla's invasion army did not meet a comparable force sent by Artabanus IV. Although Artabanus commanded the loyalty of a majority of nobles across the Parthian realm, on which his military means would have been based,<sup>55</sup> he clearly did not have a significant force in the field in Adiabene. Dio explains that Artabanus had to recruit additional forces and thus was in a much stronger position when he engaged the Roman army under Macrinus at Nisibis. It is reasonable to conjecture that Caracalla never got around to a Parthian War on a scale that might have justified his grandiose claims

<sup>53</sup> Vogt 1969, 303–07, followed by Kettenhofen 1990, 791.

<sup>54</sup> Timpe 1967, 472–75. Timpe's argument is based in part on his assertion that the notoriously unreliable Herodian is engaging in sensationalistic and rhetorical history while Dio, whose own account is much briefer and lacking the details of Caracalla's letter, is merely presenting an incident that illustrates Caracalla's deceptive nature, the marriage simply a ruse as the emperor prepares for war.

<sup>55</sup> Wolski 1993, 192; cf. Brosius 2006, 104–05.

to Alexander-ness. At best he made modest forays into Adiabene and sacked Arbela. Discarding the marriage proposal, we can instead point to Artabanus as his target because he could put up less of a resistance than Vologases. The subdued nature of Caracalla's invasion may be attributed to his not having properly conquered Armenia, given Theocritus' failure in 216 or 217. Moreover, Caracalla did not invade Vologases' territory for perhaps the same reason. Artabanus' region, Adiabene and Media, was easier to reach than Vologases' further to the south, where Ctesiphon served as the capital. It bears noting that Trajan, Verus (through Avidius Cassius), and Severus all attacked Ctesiphon having first secured Armenia either as a province or a client state. Caracalla did not have that option.

By unpacking Dio 78.12.1, the passage connecting the fates of Abgar and Chosroes, in the way I am suggesting, we may be reading too much into our source, but other evidence suggests that the juxtaposition of Armenia and Osroene in that passage was more than Dio's rhetorical contrivance; rather there was a genuine strategic connection in Caracalla's designs, which envisioned an extended Roman Empire well east of the Euphrates that would more readily support Caracalla's Parthian ambitions. Firm control of both countries was necessary for this plan to be realized, as previous experience had demonstrated. We have no reason to doubt Chosroes as the king Caracalla removed nor the latter's intention of bringing Armenia under firmer control as he had Edessa, whatever other motivations he may have had, such as extending the Roman franchise for tax purposes. The plan had been envisioned since before the beginning of his Parthian war, when Caracalla, while still in Rome, lured Abgar away from Edessa. Soon afterwards, he lured Chosroes away from Armenia, but that part of the plan went awry with Theocritus' defeat in 216 or 217. This blunted Caracalla's Alexandrine ambitions, but his reports of victory to the Senate demanded *something* to show for them, hence a more modest invasion of Adiabene. He no doubt would have returned to Armenia to finalize its submission, perhaps as a prelude to a more ambitious Parthian war against not only Artabanus but Vologases, if we should take his Alexander-mania at face value. Caracalla did indeed follow Alexander's example by dying too young, with plans unfinished, but he came up short in the scope of his achievement.

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