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Persianism in the Kingdom of Pontic Kappadokia. The Genealogical Claims of the Mithridatids

Charlotte Lerouge-Cohen

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PERSIANISM IN THE KINGDOM OF PONTIC KAPPADOKIA THE GENEALOGICAL CLAIMS OF THE MITHRIDATIDS

Charlotte Lerouge-Cohen

The kingdom of Pontic Kappadokia – which was not known as ‘Pontus’ until Eupator’s time¹– was founded in the beginning of the third century BCE by Mithridates Ktistes. Mithridates was born into the Persian family that, according to Greek sources, ‘ruled’ the Greek city of Kios in Propontis under the Achaemenids. The last of the “masters of Kios”, who had maintained the city’s rule under the Diadochi, was assassinated by Antigonos I Monophtalmus in 301 BCE; his nephew Mithridates (later known as Ktistēs)² subsequently fled to Pontic Kappadokia, where he founded a “kingdom of which he declared himself King (*basileus*)” in 281 or 280 BCE.³

The new dynasty, usually referred to by historians as the ‘Mithridatids’, rapidly integrated into the Hellenistic monarchies through intermarriage with the Seleukid house: Mithridates II (266–220) married Laodike, Seleukos II’s sister⁴, and presented his daughter Laodice to Antiochos Hierax – she finally became Achaios’s wife⁵. Her daughter, also called Laodike, married Antiochos III in 222 BCE.

THE MITHRIDATIC DYNASTY AND REFERENCES TO THE “SEVEN”

Polybius, describes the wedding, informs us of the Mithridatids’ genealogical claims:

(Antiochos) was joined by Diogenetos, the admiral from Kappadokia Pontica, bringing Laodice, the daughter of Mithradates, a virgin, the affianced bride of the King. Mithradates claimed to be a descendant of one of those seven Persians who had killed the Magus, and he had preserved in his family the government on the Pontus originally granted to them by Darius.

- 1 On this name see Reinach (1988) p. 161.
- 2 The surname ‘Ktistes’ can only be found only in textual sources: see, e.g., Strabo 12, 3, 41; Lucian, *Makrobioi* 13. It is unknown whether Mithridates adopted it officially or not.
- 3 For this date, see Reinach (1888). The tale of the Mithradatids’ origins, very largely hypothetical, is a reconstitution obtained mainly through the combination of several source texts (Diodorus Siculus 20, 111, 4; Strabo 12, 3, 41; Plutarch, *Demetrius* 4; Lucian, *Makrobioi* 13). It has been established by Ed. Meyer (1879) and admitted by all the scholars; later it was shown that Ktistes was the nephew, and not the son, of Mithridates of Kios (see Olshausen (1978). However, it raises many questions; one can wonder, for instance, which kind of ‘rule’ the Mithridatids family could exercise on Kios – we have no other example of a Persian family ‘ruling’ a Greek city in Achaemenid times. Briant (1996) p. 1051–1052 is quite skeptical about this ‘domination’, which seems to be an anachronic projection.
- 4 Porphyry FGrH260F. 32 = Eusebios, *Chron.* I, p. 251 Schoene; see also Justin 38, 5, 3.
- 5 See Polyb. 5, 74, 5 and 8, 22. See also the commentary by McGing (1986), p. 21–23.

ὁ δὲ Μιθριδάτης εὐχετο μὲν ἀπόγονος τῶν ἑπτὰ Περσῶν ἑνὸς τῶν ἐπανελομένων τὸν μάγον, διατετηρήκει δὲ τὴν δυναστείαν ἀπὸ προγόνων τὴν ἐξ ἀρχῆς αὐτοῖς διαδοθεῖσαν ὑπὸ Δαρείου παρὰ τὸν Εὐξείνιον πόντον.⁶

This text shows that the Kings of Pontic Kappadokia claimed to be descendants of one of the seven noble Persians that assassinated the usurper Smerdis in 522 at the instigation of Darius, and thus enabled him to take royal power (this well-documented episode is described by Greek sources, beginning with Herodotos, as well as by Darius' engraved inscription at Behistun).⁷

Not only the Mithridatids placed the Seven at the root of their family tree: two other Hellenistic dynasties that claimed Persian descent, namely, the Ariarathids of Kappadokia and the Orontids of Armenia, did likewise.⁸

Even though some scholars accept the idea that all these dynasties actually descended from one of the Seven, these genealogical assertions cannot be proven and are generally considered as false⁹. Even if one of these Hellenistic rulers was linked to one of the Seven, it is very doubtful that this link would still be remembered three centuries after the murder of Smerdis.

This tendency to link themselves to the Seven should probably not be understood as the remnant of an Achaemenid custom: nothing indicates that it became customary in the Achaemenid world to distinguish dignitaries by recalling their descent from one of the seven conspirators.¹⁰ The idea that Darius had given a

6 Polybius 5, 43, 1–2. I chose to translate the word *dunasteia* as ‘government’ instead of ‘kingdom’, which appears in the LCL: *dunasteia* is a more neutral term.

7 Greek and Latin sources: Aesch., Persians vv. 774–777; Hdt. 3.30.61–88; Ktesias F 13, 11–18; Justin 1.9.0. A transcription and German translation of the Behistun inscription of Darius by Weissbach (1931), p. 9–74, can be consulted at achemenet.com; the English translation by King and Thompson (1907) is available at livius.org; two recent French translations are those of Lecoq (1997); Vallat (2011). The paragraphs concerning Smerdis' assassination are paragraphs 10–14 and 68–69.

8 For the Ariarathids see Diodorus Siculus 31, 19, 1–2 (Walton edition) (= Photius, *Library* 382a sqq): the Kings of Kappadokia say that their ancestor was Anaphas, ‘one of the Seven Persians who assassinated the Magian’ (τῶν ἑπτὰ Περσῶν τὸν μάγον ἐπανελομένων ἑνός), ‘to whom (...), because of his valour, the government of Kappadokia was granted, with the understanding that no tribute would be paid to the Persians’ (ὃ φασὶ δι’ ἀνδρείαν συγχωρηθῆναι τὴν Καππαδοκίας δυναστείαν, ὥστε μὴ τελεῖν φόρους Πέρσαις); for the Orontids, see Strabo 11, 14, 15: ‘The Persians and the Macedonians, who after that time held Syria and Media, were in possession of Armenia; the last (who reigned over it) was Orontes, the descendant of Hydarnes, one of the seven Persians’ (... κατεῖχον τὴν Ἀρμενίαν Πέρσαι καὶ Μακεδόνες, μετὰ ταῦτα οἱ τὴν Συρίαν ἔχοντες καὶ τὴν Μηδίαν· τελευταῖος δ’ ὑπῆρξεν Ὀρόντης ἀπόγονος Ὑδάρνου, τῶν ἑπτὰ Περσῶν ἑνός). I here adapt the Italian translation provided by R. Nicolai and G. Traina in their edition of l. 11 of Strabo (Nicolai and Traina 2000), because the translations put forward by H.L. Jones in the LCL (1928) and by F. Lasserre in the CUF (1975) are not convincing from a historical point of view.

9 Reinach (1890) p. 3 accepted these assertions; McGing (1986) and Ballesteros-Pastor (1996) do not deny them but consider it impossible to prove them; Bosworth and Wheatley (1998) tried to justify them, but their demonstration is unconvincing, in my opinion; it seems to have convinced Ballesteros-Pastor (2012) (see p. 367), who is less skeptical than Ballesteros-Pastor (1996).

10 On this point, see Lerouge-Cohen (2013).

dunasteia on the shore of the Pontus to the Mithridatids' ancestor in order to thank him for his help should not be accepted by historians: of course, it is well known that Darius felt gratitude towards his (six) accomplices, as mentioned on the Behistun inscription¹¹; moreover, Herodotus tells us that Darius granted them some privileges not because of their courage, but because they recognized him as King: the Seven had the right to enter the Royal Palace without an 'introducer', and the King was obliged to choose his wives from among their families¹². However, it is not mentioned here that a *dunasteia* was given to them. One cannot imagine, in any case, that the Achaemenid King would present a *dunasteia* to one of his friends: as P. Briant has shown, when the King gave estates or even cities, they were above all fiscal presents, and did not necessarily imply a political domination¹³. The story told by the Mithridatids (and the Ariarathids) about Darius and their ancestors must be considered as invention¹⁴.

It is evident why they would forge such a tale. Firstly, it legitimized their dynasty's power in Pontic Kappadokia: namely, it showed that the kingdom was not a recent creation (while in fact it was) but that it had already existed in Achaemenid times, and that the Mithridatids were its legitimate rulers because they had received it from Darius. In addition, the link with the Seven, gave prestige to the dynasty: we know from Darius and Herodotus that the Seven all came from very high-born families of the Achaemenid kingdom.

This leads to the following question: When the Mithridatids (and the Ariarathids) presented themselves as descendants of one of the Seven, did they try to please a Persian 'audience'? Many scholars insist on the fact that old Persian families from the Pontic kingdom (as well as Ariarathid Kappadokia) that had been installed in Anatolia by the Achaemenids remained very powerful in the kingdoms that emerged after the fall of the Persians and the Macedonian conquest. Did their dynastic genealogical claims target these Persian aristocratic families, whose support the Kings needed and whose 'Iranian' pride they tried to exalt¹⁵? In the eyes of the Persian nobles, however, this genealogical discourse would counter-balance the real and deep Hellenization of the Kings, who spoke Greek, struck coinage

11 See the Behistun inscription par. 69 : Darius invites his successors to keep protecting the Seven and their descendants.

12 Hdt 3, 84.

13 Briant (1985a).

14 See Meyer (1879) p. 31–38 ; McGing (1986) p. 13. For an analysis of this reference to the Seven by the Mithridatids and Ariarathids, see Panitschek (1987–1988); Lerouge-Cohen (2014) (they should be understood in a Hellenistic context).

15 See McGing (1996) p. 10: genealogical claims of the Mithridatic dynasty show 'how important the Iranian element was in Pontic society'.

copying Hellenistic models¹⁶, and practiced euergetism in the main Greek religious centers¹⁷.

This interpretation is problematic. Historians have indeed often emphasized the power of the Persian families in the kingdom of Pontic Kappadokia, but this is not confirmed by the sources: in fact, the genealogical claims of the reigning dynasties represent one of the most important proofs of this alleged power. The Kings seem to have met no opposition to their Hellenizing policies from these families, and there is no proof that it would have been necessary for them to give ‘pledges of Persianism’ to render them docile. The sources do not reveal any tension between the Persian element of Pontic Kappadokia’s population and the sovereigns that ruled it.

Moreover, there is no indication that the Seven were even remembered in the Iranian world: the Arsakids never referred to them, and neither did the Sasanids that succeeded them.

In contrast, the story of the Seven was famous throughout the Greek world, and had very positive connotations: Greek sources describe the murder that they accomplished as a noble and courageous act¹⁸. The tale of a group of people killing an usurper was popular because it could easily evoke tyrannicide, and recalled Greek (and Roman) ideals of freedom¹⁹. Notably, Polybius also calls to mind the origins of Mithridates II at the time of his daughter’s wedding to Antiochos III, and those origins clearly gave prestige to the bride²⁰. If it was prestigious for a Seleukid to marry a descendant of one of the Seven, we can deduce that the references to these historical figures were not confined to an Iranian audience.

- 16 For the coinage of the Kings of Kappadokia, see Simonetta (2007): from the reign of Ariarathes III (230?–220), the royal coins show the portrait of the King on the obverse, and Athena carrying a Victory in her hand on the reverse. On the few coins struck in the Pontus by the predecessors of Mithridates Eupator, see Callataÿ (2009): these coins have specific characteristics (for example, the ‘realistic’ approach to the portraits as opposed to the idealization of the Greek ones, and the presence on the reverse of the crescent moon and star, which do not belong to Greek iconography) but they are nonetheless closely related to the conventional Hellenistic iconography and have Greek lettering.
- 17 For a summary on the Hellenization of the Kings of Pontus, Kappadokia (and Armenia), see Bernard (1985), here p. 74–85. On the euergetism of the Kings of Pontus and Kappadokia, see the Delian decrees in honor of Pharnakes (*ID* 1497bis (160/159 BCE) and of Mithridates V Euergetes (*ID* 1557–1558). In Kappadokia, Ariarathes V (163–130 BCE) was granted Athenian citizenship (*JG* II2 3781) and was honored, shortly before 130, as was his wife Nysa, in a decree issued by the Athenian Dionysiac Technites (*JG* II2 1330); see also Le Guen (2001) p. 67–74.
- 18 See e.g., Aesch., *Persians* v. 774–777; Plato, *Laws*, 695c and *Ep.* VII, 332b; Justin 1, 10, 1. Plato, in particular, strongly idealizes Darius because of the way he took the royal power, and of the kind of relationships he established with his ancient accomplices. P. Briant underlines the legendary dimension acquired by the Seven in the Hellenic world, as early as in the Classical period: see Briant (1996) p. 140–149.
- 19 In *Hdt* 3, 67, Smerdis, seeking the people’s support in order to reinforce his power, presents features similar to a Greek tyrant: see Lerouge-Cohen (2014).
- 20 See Gabelko (2009) p. 52–53: the marriages between the Seleukids and the other dynasties of Anatolia were researched by the Seleukids for their political aspect and by the ‘minor’ dynasties for the prestige they bestowed on them; supposedly, however, these marriages were all the more valuable for the Seleukids if the bride was high-born.

Subsequently, I hypothesize that reference to the Seven in the kingdom of Pontic Kappadokia should be understood in a Hellenistic context instead of an Iranian one. The Mithridatids (like the Ariarathids) had probably learnt the story of the Seven from Greek sources; their connections to these glorious characters put them in a favorable light in the Hellenistic world – but not in an allegedly ‘Persian’ or ‘Iranian’ context.

This late use and recreation of the Iranian past seem to present a clear example of Persianism.

THE DOUBLE GENEALOGY OF MITHRIDATES EUPATOR: REFERENCES TO THE ACHAEMENIDS²¹

The Mithridatids’ genealogical claims underwent a major change during the reign of Mithridates Eupator (111–63 B. C.). Eupator apparently made no mention of the Seven: instead, he boasted about his descent from Cyrus and Darius on one side, and from Alexander and Seleukos on the other. We know this from the famous speech attributed to him by Pompeius Trogus in his *Historiae Philippicae*, and from an indirect speech transmitted by Justin²². As he addresses his troops on the eve of his first war against Rome, Eupator first justifies his decision to wage war by explaining that the Romans attacked him first, and then gives proof that the latter are far from invincible. He then clarifies why the Romans are acting so unjustly towards him: they loathe and envy Kings, since their own first Kings were of low birth (38.6.7–8). Mithridates subsequently brags about his own noble origins, as opposed to those of the Roman Kings.

Suppose, he continued, that he was compared with the Romans in terms of breeding. He was superior to that motley rabble of refugees since he could trace his line back on his father’s side to Cyrus and Darius, the founders of the Persian empire, and on his mother’s side to Alexander the Great and Seleukos Nikator, founders of the Macedonian empire.

*Se autem, seu nobilitate illis comparetur, clariorem illa conluvie convenarum esse, qui paternos majores suos a Cyro Darioque, conditoribus Persici regni, maternos a magno Alexandro ac Nicatore Seleuco, conditoribus imperii Macedonici, referat.*²³

- 21 For this part of the paper see also Lerouge-Cohen (forthcoming), where I express similar views.
- 22 Justin 38.3.10. Trogus disapproved of the insertion of direct speech in historical works and it is therefore usually accepted that Justin accurately reproduced this speech from Trogus’ original text, cf. e.g., Jal (1987), p. 196. R. Develin in Develin & Yardley (1994), p. 5, however, questioned the assumption that Justin was faithful to Trogus’ version; according to Ballesteros Pastor (2013), the speech was invented entirely by Justin and did not originally feature in Trogus’ narrative.
- 23 Justin 38.7.1. Some doubts have been raised about the authenticity of the speech. Even if it was re-written by Trogus, it is undeniable that the contents must be at least partially faithful to the historical reality. For further discussion on the authenticity of the speech, see, e.g., McGing (1986), 154–162, most notably 160–162; Ballesteros Pastor (1996), 391; Ballesteros Pastor (2006); the speech is fully analyzed in Ballesteros Pastor (2013). On the traces of revision after the event, see Yardley (2003): 21–23. Trogus seems to have been greatly influenced by Livy, and Mithridates’ speech in particular contains many Livian reminiscences; see also 89–90 for

Mithridates is not the first Hellenistic King to link himself to the Achaemenids: Diodorus tells us that the Ariarathids of Kappadokia had already done so from the time of the reign of Ariarathes V (163–130 BCE), claiming that the founder of their dynasty, Anaphas, was of the Seven and a cousin of Cyrus on his mother's side²⁴. Mithridates, however, is the first King to underline his dual origins in all accounts. His double genealogy is partially based on historic fact: Eupator was indeed a descendant of the Seleukid dynasty through political inter-dynastic marriages²⁵, but naturally not of Alexander the Great, as Seleukos was not related to Alexander by blood. His Achaemenid connections can neither be proved nor disproved: Mithridates was of Persian origin and his family was possibly linked to the Achaemenid line,²⁶ but the precise nature of this connection, if it even existed, was long forgotten in Mithridates' time. Another King, Antiochos I Theos of Kommagene (c. 69–40 BCE), whose reign began before Mithridates' death, would in turn claim both Achaemenid (through his father) and Macedonian (through his mother) ancestry²⁷ a few decades later.

- Ciceronian reminiscences. Ballesteros Pastor (2006): 581–596, here p. 595, notes the occurrence in the speech of geographic terms, such as 'Bithynia and Pontus', or 'Lesser Armenia', which are associated with Roman expressions coined at the time of Augustus.
- 24 Diod. Sic. 31, 19, 1. Nothing prevents us from surmising that the predecessors of Mithridates VI, following in the footsteps of their neighbors and rivals of Kappadokia, had already attempted to link their dynasty to that of the Achaemenids, even though no sources exist that provide any further knowledge. Panitschek (1987–1988) emphasizes the rivalry between the two kingdoms.
- 25 His mother Laodike was allegedly the daughter of Antiochos IV; but this cannot be ascertained with certainty, as it has been deduced from her (dynastic) name only (Ballesteros Pastor (1996), p. 31). Moreover, the dynasty had been intermarrying with the Seleukid house for a long time, as we have already seen: Mithridates II (266–220) had married the sister of Seleukos II, Antiochos III had married Laodike of Pontus, and Pharnakes I (200–169 BCE) had married Nysa, the daughter of Laodike and Antiochos III. Mithridates could therefore legitimately claim to be a Seleukid descendant.
- 26 Reinach (1890), p. 3–4 does not entirely exclude this tradition. It is rejected more often than included: see for instance Meyer (1879) p. 32; McGing (1986) p. 10; Panitschek (1987–1988) p. 73–95; Ballesteros Pastor (1996), p. 24 and p. 290. Regarding the Seven (see n. 8), the different hypotheses described by A. B. Bosworth and P. V. Wheatley that aim to justify the reality of this claim (see Bosworth and Wheatley (1998)) are not convincing enough to end the debate. Very recently, L. Ballesteros Pastor went back on his previous statements and tried to prove that the Mithridates line descended from Achaemenid origins: see Ballesteros Pastor (2012). He reminds us that Pharnabazos, the satrap of Hellespontine Phrygia in the early 4th century, married Apama, daughter of King Artaxerxes II, and also claims that the ancestors of Mithridates Ctistes belonged to the same line as Pharnabazos. Nevertheless, filiation between Pharnabazos and the Mithridatids does not appear probable. McGing (1986) p. 15 does not include Pharnabazos among Ctistes' ancestors.
- 27 On each of the two monumental terraces of the sanctuary of the Nemrud Dagh, which was consecrated to Antiochos' cult, a series of stelae displayed the King's ancestors; on both terraces, the ancestors are divided into two series: those of the maternal side and those of the paternal side; each ancestor was identified by a relief and an inscription. 'King of Kings Darius the Great, son of Hystaspes' (βασιλέα βασιλέων μέγαν Δαρείον τὸν Ὑστάσπ[ου]) features as the first ancestor on the paternal side; 'Alexander the Great, son of Philip' (μέγ[αν Ἀλέ]ξανδρον τὸν ἐκ βασιλέ-|ως Φιλίππου) is the first of the maternal ancestors. For the

While the idea that the Pontic dynasty descended from one of the Seven did not disappear from Greek sources²⁸, Mithridates' Achaemenid claim was widely accepted: according to Appian, Mithridates was a descendant of Darius to the sixteenth degree²⁹; Ampelius, the preceptor of Macrinus, presented Darius as the ancestor of Artabazes, "the founder of the kingdom of Mithridates"³⁰. Mithridates, King of Bosphoros and descendant of Mithridates Eupator through his grand-daughter Dynamis, still maintained that he was the "heir of the great Achemenes" (*prole magni Achaemenis*) during the reign of Claudius.³¹ In contrast, the sources never mention the 'Macedonian' claim – except in the speech transmitted by Justin.

Eupator's claims to Achaemenid ancestry may be associated with the fact that he chose to depict Pegasus, Perseus' winged horse, on the obverse of the coinage of the first part of his reign³²: Perseus was reputed to be the heroic founder of the Persian race³³. This clearly underlines the assumption that Mithridates intended to link himself closely to the Persian world (albeit not precisely, in the case of Pegasus, to the Achaemenids)³⁴.

Once again, as was the case with the "Seven" claim, the question is whether this choice should be understood, on Eupator's part, as a pledge to his kingdom's Persian aristocracy, as is often assumed in scholarly literature: by introducing him-

text and translation of the Nemrud Dagh inscriptions, see K. Dörner in Sanders (1996), vol. 1, chapter 5, p. 254–355; specifically for the ancestors' inscription p. 323; see also Facella (2006), p. 87 and 270. On Nemrud Dagh and Kommagene, see Facella (2006); Wagner (2012); and most recently Brijder (2014); on the 'ancestors' galleries' see in particular Jacobs (2012) and Messerschmidt (2012); also Strootman (in press).

28 Panitschek (1987–1988) underlines the non-unified aspect of the Mithridatid dynasty's genealogical traditions. See also Ballesteros Pastor (2013) p. 275–277.

29 App., *Mith.*, 540.

30 Ampelius 30, 5: 'It is from (Darius) that Artabazus descends, he who was, according to Sallustius Crispus, the founder of the kingdom of Mithridates'. (*Darius [...], a quo Artabanes originem ducit, quem conditorem regni Mithridatis fuisse confirmat Sallustius Crispus*). On Artabazus see Ballesteros-Pastor (2012).

31 See Tac., *Ann.*, 12, 18, 4. With these words, Mithridates aims at convincing Eunones, King of the Aorsi, to receive him in his kingdom after a military defeat.

32 See Callataÿ (1997), p. 8–27 and pl. 1–15: Pegasus appears on the reverse of the tetradrachms minted between 96 and 85 BCE in the 'realist' style. Pegasus is strongly reminiscent of the Greek hero Perseus (see e. g., McGing (1986) p. 97), who appears on many coins issued by the Pontic cities; these coins faithfully reflect royal propaganda and show how important this hero was for the King (*ibidem*, p. 94–95).

33 See Callataÿ (1997) p. 63–86, with figs. 32–38 on p. 76.

34 One could add the fact that a famous inscription found in the city of Nymphaion shows that Mithridates had taken the Achaemenid title of 'King of Kings' in 102/101 (see Vinogradov 1990); and also that he installed 'satraps', again an Achaemenid reminiscence, in the conquered Greek world (see Appian *Mithridatic Wars* 3, 21; 5, 35; 7, 46). However, only one is still here in the frame of "genealogical claims". Moreover, these Achaemenid references are questionable: 'King of Kings' may evoke the Parthian Kings, who adopted the title from the reign of Mithridates II (123–188), instead of the Achaemenids (the Persian King is never called 'King of Kings' in classical Greek sources; the title does not appear in Greek and Roman sources before the 1st century B.C.). The Seleukids made use of the 'satraps' even after the reign of Antiochos III, who is supposed to have replaced satraps with *strategoï*: see Capdetrey (2007) p. 283.

self as a descendant of both the Achaemenids and Alexander, the King would try to court his two main ‘audiences’, the Persians on the one side, and the Greeks on the other side³⁵. The Persian aristocracy would have been proud to have an heir of Cyrus as King, whereas Greeks in the kingdom and beyond would identify with a man connected to the memory of Alexander and the Seleukids. These two separate threads of propaganda would lead to the same result: the desire to take the power in Asia Minor back from Rome. This interpretation of a dualistic speech contains several flaws.

Firstly, it postulates not only that the kingdom’s population was made up exclusively of Persians and Greeks, which ignores the specific Anatolian population that constituted the majority of the demography, but also that the Greeks and Persians would have developed in completely distinct directions, thus entailing the elaboration of two different genealogical traditions, which is not plausible. Is it truly plausible to think that at the heart of a kingdom in the first century BCE where a strong familiarity with Greek culture was essential if one wished to serve the King – and thereby belong to the elite – the Persians remained so viscerally attached to their Persian past that they required a specific discourse to differentiate themselves from the discourse that the ‘Greeks’ recognized themselves in?

Moreover, Eupator does not establish any links between the proclamation of his Achaemenid origins and a Persian sense of solidarity in his speech. He never encourages the Persians *as Persians* to unite around him to chase the Romans out of Asia. The existence of a ‘Persian feeling’ in the Pontic kingdom that was directed against Greek cultural hegemony is highly doubtful. If, however, such a sentiment could be acknowledged, nothing in Mithridates’ speech indicates that the King made use of it, by proclaiming himself a descendant of Cyrus and Darius, in reference to the war he was about to wage on Rome.

The presence of Pegasus on his coinage is indeed a sign of the royal desire to recall the Persian origins of his dynasty, but it is also proof of his knowledge of Greek sources: only Greeks, or at least those who knew Greek culture, could understand this reference to Perseus as the founder of the Persian race, as it was told by Herodotus³⁶ and does not appear in Persian sources. Notably, Perseus was

35 See, e. g., McGing (1986) p. 10; *ibidem* p. 107, where he distinguishes between the Greek subjects and the ‘eastern subjects and prospective eastern subjects’ whom the King addressed when emphasizing his Achaemenid lineage. Panitschek (1987–1988), p. 95, states that the Mithridatids’ Persian claims not directed to the Greeks but toward the ‘Kleinasiaten und Iranier Anatoliens’. Both P. Panitschek and B. McGing, conclude that the target audience of the ‘Achaemenid’ part of Mithridates’ propaganda included Persians and Anatolians, in short, all those that were not Greek, and that this created a problem of definition: why would the Anatolians be open to Persian themes, and if they were, why should the Greeks not be equally receptive? We can also cite Reinach (1890), p. 299–300: Mithridate ‘sut jouer de l’ Olympe et de l’ Avesta, des souvenirs d’ Alexandre et des reliques de Darius, du despotisme et de la démagogie, de la barbarie et de la civilisation, comme autant d’ instruments de règne, autant de moyens de séduire et d’ entraîner les hommes ... ’ See also *ibidem* p. 35–37.

36 According to Herodotus (7, 150–152), certain accounts say that Xerxes would have sent ambassadors to the Argians to demonstrate they had a common ancestor with the Persians, since the latter descended from Perses, the son of Perseus and Andromeda; it would therefore be

also an extremely popular figure in the Hellenistic era in the Greek cities of Asia that referred to him as their founder, most famously Tarsus³⁷, which was a way for them to emphasize their Hellenism, namely, by proving their link to the ancient Greek city of Argos³⁸. The same is true for the dynasty of Philip and Alexander of Macedonia, who were called the Argeads. For this reason, the reference to Perseus is rather ambiguous.

As far as the specific Achaemenid connections in Hellenistic times are concerned, it is clear that being an heir to the ancient Persian Kings bestowed a royal prestige that was not confined to an Iranian context. Diodorus Siculus, for instance, described the ties uniting Cyrus to the Ariarathides at length, thereby showing that, for him, those ties augmented the glory of Ariarathes V, a King whom he valued very much³⁹. Similarly, Josephus reveals that Princess Glaphyra of Kappadokia, who had married one of Herod's sons between the years 15–17 CE, never ceased to brag about her royal origins in front of her in-laws, recalling her descent from Temenos on one side and from Darius on the other – an attitude that made her hated by the other women at the court.⁴⁰ In a Jewish kingdom, this claim would certainly not be meant to entice the Persian population.

Notably, the Persian Kings that appear in the genealogy during the Hellenistic era are Cyrus and Darius I, who both were positively portrayed in the Greek tradition, as opposed to their successors, Kambyses and Xerxes⁴¹. More generally, Herodotus as well as the IVth century *Persika* testify that the Greek writers from the Classical era had real interest in the Persian Kings: the Greeks had real knowledge of the Achaemenids and did not systematically deny them, as might be assumed⁴². In contrast, the Achaemenids, like the Seven, seem to have been entirely forgotten in the Arsacid and Sassanid kingdoms⁴³.

natural for them to ally themselves with the Persians. Either Herodotus replicates a purely Greek tradition, or Xerxes was sufficiently aware of Greek mythology to use this account to diplomatic ends. In either case, the link between Perseus and the Persians does not originate from Persian culture.

37 See Robert (1977), here p. 96–132.

38 For the ambiguous quality of the reference to Perseus and for a list of the cities claiming a link to this hero, see Briant (1985b), here p. 185–187.

39 Diodorus Siculus 31, 19, 1–2 ; 31, 19, 7–8: Ariarathes 'received a Greek education' (παιδείας τε Ἑλληνικῆς μετασχεῖν) and made Kappadokia 'unknown to the Greeks', 'a place of sojourn to men of culture' (τοῖς πεπαιδευμένοις ἐμβιωτήριον).

40 Jos., *Bell.* 1, 228–229: Glaphyra boasted about her origins and mocked the other women in the palace that had been chosen not for their birth, but for their beauty.

41 For Cyrus see, of course, Xenophon's *Cyropaedia*; Cyrus and Darius are presented as examples of good Persian Kings: see Plato, *Laws* 694a–695e; Darius: Plato, *Ep.* 7, 332 b. After these Kings, the Achaemenids degenerated: on this topic see Briant (1989).

42 About the *Persika*, see recently Lenfant (2014).

43 A certain number of historians base themselves on a passage from the Byzantine historian George Syncellus (ed. Niebuhr, Bonn, 1829, 539, 14) stating that the first Arsacids, Arsaces and Tiridates, 'descended from the Persian Artaxerxes' in order to bolster the idea that the Parthians tried to pass themselves off as the descendants of the Achaemenids. See e.g., Tarn (1923); Neusner (1963), here p. 43; see also Wiesehöfer (2001) p. 133. However, this source is so late and the history of the Arsacids has been so much transformed over time (see for example the

The King's claim to a Persian identity (through Pegasus/Perseus) is therefore transmitted through a common Hellenistic cultural background; the selective claim to Achaemenid ancestry seems likewise related to the cultural Greek world: once again, Eupator's genealogical claims very clearly give evidence of Persianism.

THE DOUBLE GENEALOGY OF MITHRIDATES EUPATOR: THE MACEDONIAN KINGS

What does the reference to Alexander and Seleukos tell us? This question is of course less important in a paper devoted to Persianism than the previous question was. However, it is important to underline one particular point.

Various sources, apart from this genealogical claim, show Mithridates' intention to attach himself to the figure of Alexander.⁴⁴ It is commonly assumed that these references to Alexander had a strong anti-Roman signification:⁴⁵ according to Claudia Bohm, to recall Alexander's name – which was not a new attitude among the later Hellenistic rulers at all⁴⁶ – began to sound dangerous to Roman ears after Eupator⁴⁷. Admittedly, the King does not use the trope of the conqueror in a 'nationalist' Greek sense in his speech to his troops. He does not use the name of Alexander to appeal to the unification of the Greeks and the necessary protection of the latter, nor does he try to encourage them by calling to mind the exploits of his glorious predecessor – in fact, further on in the speech, Alexander's qualities are even presented as inferior to those of the Pontic King.⁴⁸ The mention of Alexander remains unique and does not diverge towards an exposition of a particular policy aimed at the Greeks. This does not mean that another, more loaded use of the Macedonian conqueror trope was not available to support Mithridates' actions; it quite simply does not appear in this particular speech.

Just as searching the speech for any appeal to a Persian sentiment would be in vain, the reference to Alexander and Seleukos is not mixed with political philhellenism directed against the Romans. Mithridates does not establish any link be-

historical summary written about them by Ammianus Marcellinus (23, 6, 1–9), who established no distinction whatsoever between Parthians and Persians) that it seems imprudent to use it as a reliable source: see Lerouge (2007) p. 191 note 48.

44 See all the attestations in Bohm (1989) p. 153–187.

45 See Bohm (1989) p. 115: 'eine antirömische Komponente gewann das Alexanderbild erst in späterer Zeit, als Mithridates VI. Eupator die Alexanderangleichung programmatisch in seinem Machtkampf gegen Roms Herrschaft im Osten einband'.

46 First, King Pyrrhus comes to mind; Bohm (1989) analyzes the cases of Alexander of Megalopolis, of Seleukid pretenders to the throne, like Alexander Balas, Diodotos Tryphon and Alexander Zabinas, and of Ptolemaic Kings like Ptolemy X and Ptolemy XI.

47 In the age of Augustus, Greeks with strong anti-Roman sentiments referred to the name of Alexander and spread the idea that, if the Macedonian King had met the Roman armies, he would have defeated them: see Liv. 9, 17–19 and 9, 18, 6, in particular.

48 Just. 38.7.2: Mithridates is the only one that conquered Kappadokia, Paphlagonia, Pontus or Bithynia: 'none of these peoples had even been reached by the famous Alexander, who subdued the whole of Asia, nor by anyone who succeeded or preceded him'.

tween his origins and the self-ordained mission he might have followed among the Greeks. In fact, by presenting himself as a descendant of the Achaemenids, on the one hand, and of Alexander and Seleukos, on the other, Mithridates seems to aim most of all to add prestige to his dynasty not simply in front of two different audiences, but before the eyes of the entire population of the Hellenistic world. His first aim is to humiliate the Romans, who had low origins. Obviously, he mentions his Achaemenid lineage for the same reason: the fact that he descended from *two* royal families and not just from one was important in order to debase the Romans. Moreover, the two lineages that Mithridates attributed to himself were complementary. The King focused the glory that each of them provided on his unique person and thus profited from two different sources of prestige and political charisma.

The simultaneous reference to the Achaemenids and the Seleukids in Mithridates' speech probably had a second use. It provided the King a source of legitimacy for the domination of the whole of Asia, whereas the presence of Romans in Asia Minor could only be explained by their greed (Justin 18.6.8). According to Hellenistic ideas, it was a legitimate claim for a King to take territories that one of his ancestors had conquered by force as his own property.⁴⁹ The fact that he was a descendant of both the Achaemenids and Alexander and Seleukos, who had all been empire-builders, doubly justified Mithridates' claim to Asia.

CONCLUSION

The Mithridatic dynasty, as well as the Ariarathids of Kappadokia, established a link with the Persian past early in their history: they claimed to be descendent from one of the Seven that killed the usurper. Later, Eupator abandoned the reference to the Seven, choosing instead to emphasize his Achaemenid ancestors, namely, Cyrus and Darius. He added a Macedonian heritage (Alexander and Seleukos) to this glorious ancestry, thus forging a double genealogy for himself. These Pontic references to the Seven and the Achaemenids should be understood, in my opinion, as examples of Persianism. The Kings selected Persian events and individuals (the Seven, Cyrus and Darius) that were well-known across the Greek world and enjoyed a very good reputation: the Persian past was probably known from Greek sources. Their Persian identity was not transmitted from a remote past through the centuries, but was consciously recreated in Hellenistic times instead. The claim to Persian or Achaemenid roots was not targeted to an Iranian audience: it was a deliberate way to gain prestige and legitimacy, which could be combined with Macedonian claims, in a world that was not 'Greek' or 'Iranian', but simply 'Hellenistic'.

49 On this topic, see especially Ma (2000): Antiochos III based his policy of the re-conquest of Asia Minor on the idea that he was recapturing an inheritance that was his right. On Antiochos III, see also Polyb. 18, 51, 3–6. Another reference is the analysis of Fowler (2005), p. 126.