Mithridates VI Eupator: Victim or Aggressor?

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Once he gets down to the events leading immediately to the First Mithridatic War, Appianos, often regarded as a not very good historian, presents a consistently coherent interpretation of events.[1] After initially acquiescing in the restoration of Ariobarzanes to Kappadokia, Mithridates expels him again, and Nikomedes from Bithynia. Manius Aquillius restores them, and when Nikomedes is forced by the Romans into a plundering raid of Pontos, he meets no opposition as Mithridates wanted "many and just complaints for war" (*Mith.* 11). Pelopidas, aware that the Roman officers wanted to start a war, pretended otherwise, to acquire "more, and more fitting, reasons for the coming war" (*Mith.* 13). He tells the Romans that Mithridates was not weak or unprepared to defend himself. The Bithynians agree. Mithridates, they maintained, had been plotting against Nikomedes for a long time; he expelled Nikomedes, whom you Romans confirmed on the throne, a move designed more against you than against us; he pays no heed to your orders, such as your ban on Asian kings entering Europe (his annexation of the Chersonese demonstrates that). Furthermore just look at his massive preparations, they urge: Thrace, Scythia, Armenia as allies, the Ptolemies and Seleukids being courted too, and a huge fleet. Against whom is this all designed? Not against us, but against you Romans. He is angry with you about Phrygia and Kappadokia, and he is afraid of your growing power. Such was the Bithynian case. After yet another Pontic invasion of Kappadokia, Pelopidas presents the Roman envoys with a summary of Mithridates' complaints, coupled with a threatening inventory of Pontic military strength, and an offer to send the whole dispute to Rome for arbitration. But the Romans have made up their mind about what they are going to do, and Pelopidas is summarily dismissed. Appianos does not state it directly, but although the Roman ambassadors had said only that they would be restoring Ariobarzanes to Kappadokia, the positioning of the Roman allied forces (*Mith.* 17) makes it quite clear that they intended far more than this. Appianos had no doubt that the war was now about to begin.

After the war, Mithridates claims the Roman generals started it and he just acted in self-defence, out of necessity rather than design (*Mith.* 56), but Sulla will have none of it: you brought on the war, he says, by preventing the restoration of Nikomedes; you had been planning war for a long time hoping to rule the world: events in Kappadokia, Phrygia and Bithynia were

just excuses to cover your real intentions. The clearest evidence is your huge military preparations, when you were at war with no one, and above all the timing: you knew we were too preoccupied with the Social War to oppose you (*Mith.* 57).

Appianos' account may be coherent, but is it right? Standard analyses of events leading to the First Mithridatic War, while questioning particular aspects of Appianos' interpretation of what happened, tended until recently to accept it (more or less).[2] Serious shortcomings, however, in Appianos' version have been convincingly highlighted, particularly in relation to his scapegoating of the Roman commissioners in Asia Minor.[3] For present purposes, however, my perspective is a Pontic one. The question I want to address is whether the picture of Mithridates, scheming hard to cast himself in the role of the aggrieved, but in fact with a long-standing desire for war with Rome, might be right, or is merely the interpretation of our sources looking back and confusing what happened with what was planned. Roman policy and actions, of course, come into play, but it would be possible for Appianos to misunderstand the Roman role in events, and still be correct about the ambitions of Mithridates. Karl Strobel has argued at length that Mithridates was fundamentally a compliant Hellenistic king, who respected the structures of the Hellenistic world, and was bent on avoiding open conflict with Rome; the real aggressor was Bithynia.[4] In this article I will be challenging that position, and reasserting the older view of an ambitious Mithridates, who does move consciously, if carefully, to a show-down with Rome. I will be limiting my comments to the first war. There may have been particular circumstances leading to the third war, but both Appianos (*Mith.* 70) and Sallust (*Hist.* 4.69 Maur.) state that Mithridates regarded it as no more than a continuation of the first war, for which Rome was responsible. So the vital question is, who started it all?

It should be conceded at the outset that to argue that the ancient sources worked backwards from their general assessment of Mithridates to specifics, is a good starting-point for questioning their reliability. When you look backwards from the end of the story it is easy to see in Mithridates, as I have, "one of the most aggressive and determined opponents the Senate and People of Rome ever faced".[5] I believe that is a correct judgement, but also very general, and possibly misleading, if it is taken to mean that right from the beginning of his reign Mithridates was bent on world conquest. While I did not intend it that way, the ancient sources probably did. They observed the conquests and violence of the first war and bitter determination of the king in the third war, and some deduced from this that he was a sort of eastern Hannibal, imbued with a deep hatred for all things Roman, and equipped with plans for war, right from his accession (App. *Mith.* 102, 109; Plut. *Pomp.* 41; Dio Cass. 37.11.1; Florus 1.40.15). They then filled in the details of their accounts retrospectively in line with this view. That could be how it worked – and the Hannibal part of the story certainly looks like retrospective myth-making – but the possibil-

ity remains that they got the aggressive Mithridates right, even if they overdramatised the picture.

The Mithridatic family background may provide a context for the outlook of Mithridates Eupator. Although they belonged to what was clearly a Persian family, it was generally agreed since the time of Meyer that claims to descent from Achaemenid royalty were propaganda, devised, particularly in the time of Eupator, to give the family added lustre and nobility.[6] Bosworth and Wheately, however, have made a strong case that the family was directly related to Dareios himself.[7] This should serve to remind us of the importance of the Iranian roots for Pontos and its most famous king, although that is not to say that Greekness and Alexander imitation were not a vital ingredient of Mithridates' identity.[8] The Persian character of the kingdom is highlighted, for instance, by the temple of the Persian deities at Zela, which controlled extensive territory under the authority of the priest and where, Strabon tells us, the people of Pontos made their most sacred vows (Strab. 11.8.4, 12.3.37). Persian names are found scattered throughout the kingdom, and of course, Mithridates Eupator made sure to give all his sons good Persian names.[9] He used eunuchs and had a harem (or at least practised multiple marriage), called his governors satraps, called himself, an inscription from Nymphaion seems to show, "great king of kings", sacrificed to Ahuramazda (evidently) on mountaintops like the Persian kings at Pasargadai.[10] It is surely highly indicative of the Persian cultural character of the kingdom that he, and his predecessors, sought validation among their subjects through their family's claim to Persian descent. It may also explain the readiness of the Seleukid monarchs to marry into the Pontic royal family, a deal whose advantage to the Seleukids is by no means self-evident: it is easy to understand what Pontos got out of marriage alliances with the mightiest of Alexander's successor kingdoms, but not so obvious what the Seleukids thought they were getting. The answer of Sherwin-White and Kuhrt is attractive:[11] Pontic marriages offered them something of "the grandeur, hierarchy and courtly royal ideology of the Achaemenids". The Mithridatids got Hellenistic recognition, the Seleukids Iranian respectability.

This Persian element in the identity of Mithridates Eupator is important for its potential influence on his royal outlook. He was the descendant of mighty Achaemenid kings, for whom one of the characteristics of royal greatness was conquest. But Mithridates was no fool. He learnt from his grandfather, Pharnakes, that imperial expansion in Asia Minor was problematic, and he moved with care, although that in itself does not mean he lacked the sort of imperial ambitions that I am suggesting his Achaemenid family background might have given him.[12] What exactly Mithridates was thinking, for instance, when he invaded Greece during the first war, we are not told. There may well have been "a touch of improvisation about the operations",[13] but the question of what he thought he was doing in Greece in the first place is rarely asked. With Rome still not responding to his conquest of Asia Minor, the opportu-

nity for further success offered itself. But why was Greece attractive? I have suggested that it might have been a mixture of aggressive defence – protecting Asia by fighting away from it – and the lure of his philhellenic image: the saviour of the Asiatic Greeks also saving the mainland Greeks. I would now add the possibility of Achaemenid thinking. This was the land Mithridates' great forbears Dareios and Xerxes (whose name two of his sons bore) aspired to conquer. By taking Greece was he trying to succeed where they failed?

This aggressive thinking would certainly not be entertained by the sort of compliant king, who, according to Strobel, fits in with the general trend of late Hellenistic history: Eupator's policy of avoiding direct confrontation with Rome, he argues, "coincided with the political structures developed within the Hellenistic world since the Peace of Apameia". He just wanted a nice secure Black Sea-based kindom "that respected Roman supremacy".[14] I do not believe the evidence supports this picture of a neatly structured world in which everyone understood their place, played by the rules and "respected" Rome.[15] To be sure, you could try to be "a good boy", so to speak, in this Roman-dominated world. The classic example is Attalos II of Pergamon, enunciating in his famous letter to the priest of Kybele the same sort of obsequious pro-Roman policy as that advocated by the Greek politician Kallikrates.[16] But if some policy-makers felt that this was the most advantageous course to follow, there were just as many who did not. Antiochos IV certainly did not play by Rome's, or anyone else's, rules when he almost succeeded in conquering Egypt in 168 BC. When threatened unequivocally by C. Popillius Laenas (Polyb. 29.27), he made his calculations and backed off, but he had undoubtedly tried to extract the greatest possible advantage for himself out of Roman preoccupations in Macedonia. His decision to yield to Popillius was not based on a policy of avoiding armed conflict with Rome, merely on the self-interested consideration that war, at this time, was not worth the risk. Pharnakes did not recognise any rules either, when he made his challenge for dominance in Asia Minor. Demetrios, the rightful heir to the Seleukid throne, but held in Rome since 175 BC, defied Roman wishes by escaping in 162 BC, repossessing his kingdom and executing the Roman-approved Antiochos V (Polyb. 31.11-15; I *Macc.* 7-8; Jos. *AJ* 12.414-419; App. *Syr.* 47; Diod. 31.32). He also killed the Roman-backed pretender Timarchos, and the Jewish prince Judas Makkabaios, with whom Rome was supposed to have a treaty;[17] and then installed Orophernes on the throne of Kappadokia. The Senate did not like any of this, but they made little decisive effort to stop it. They did become involved to the extent of proposing that Kappadokia be split between Ariarathes V and Orophernes, but they made no response when Attalos II of Pergamon used military force to re-establish Ariarathes on the throne.[18]

That was in 156 BC. In that year too Prusias II invaded Pergamon, and for a long time ignored the Roman embassies sent to stop the war, even maltreating them on one occasion.[19] At about this time Ariarathes and Attalos displayed no hesitation in attacking the city of Priene, which appealed for assistance first

to Rhodes and then Rome (Polyb. 33.6; Ager 1996, no. 143). And while Pergamon and Bithynia were conducting their war, Rhodes and Crete were also engaged in a war (155-153 BC) that attracted little urgent interest in Rome.[20] In 149 Attalos II also invaded Bithynia to help Nikomedes II take the throne from Prusias II: there is no sign that he either asked permission from Rome or that the Senate reacted at all (App. *Mith.* 4-7).

I do not believe that there were any obvious late Hellenistic structures into which Mithridates' policies can be made to fit. The main parameters were obvious: the revolt of Andriskos, the Achaian War and the war against Aristonikos all demonstrated that however lethargic the Senate may have been about local, or even interregal, disputes, in Asia Minor and Greece, if you opposed Rome directly with military force, you were going to face her armies. That was absolutely clear, and if some thought it was worth the risk, others did not. How far you could go, short of outright military challenge, was difficult to gauge, but some Hellenistic kings, including most obviously Mithridates, tried to find out.

Pontic conquests in the Black Sea are seen by Strobel as not really relevant to the issue of Mithridates' ambitions in relation to Rome and world conquest, there being, as he claims, no Roman presence or interests there to limit Eupator.[21] This is disputable. Macedonia's eastern frontier with the Thracians was of considerable interest to Rome. In 119, 114, 112, and 109 BC Roman armies were engaged, both successfully and unsuccessfully, with the Thracians.[22] Roman interest in Thrace must have given them very serious concern about what was happening in the Black Sea, at least on its west coast. But Rome had shown concern with the area even earlier. In the treaty between Pharnakes and Chersonesos in 179 or 155 BC, both parties undertake "to maintain their friendship with the Romans and do nothing contrary to their interests".[23] Why did Rome have a relationship of *amicitia* with Chersonesos, if she had no interests in the Black Sea? Even if the Euxine might not have been central enough to Roman concerns for the Senate to threaten military action against a king of Pontos acquiring an empire and network of allies around almost its entire circuit, it would be hard to imagine that the Senate failed to take note, and was anything other than extremely concerned by developments in the region. And for our assessment of the overall character of Eupator's reign, his whole Black Sea policy can surely only be that of an extremely ambitious young monarch.

In Asia Minor Mithridates started with care, following the policy of his father Euergetes in seeking to exert indirect control in Kappadokia.[24] Justinus (38.1.1) says Gordios murdered Ariarathes VI at the instigation of Eupator. Strobel simply denies Eupator's involvement, attributing the murder to internal Kappadokian politics.[25] Gordios was such a close associate of Eupator afterwards, that Justinus' statement is certainly credible, although unprovable. There is no need to interpret this assassination as the beginning of a new expansionist policy, but we can note that Eupator acted swiftly. We are in about

116/115 BC, when he was still only in the process of establishing sole control in Pontos. This was a king who was not just going to let things drift along.

After this the evidence points to a policy of steady escalation. The invasion of Paphlagonia with Nikomedes III was blatantly expansionist (Just. *Epit.* 37.4.3; 38.5.4; 38.7.10). Sulla's anger at the timing of Mithridates' aggression towards Kappadokia and Bithynia at the beginning of the first war (App. *Mith.* 57), would surely have been echoed by Romans in the case of Paphlagonia too: the last decade of the 2nd century was a time when Roman security was gravely threatened in Africa, Sicily and northern Italy. The kings ignored the Roman order to restore Pahlagonia to its former state; Mithridates claiming a hereditary right to it, and Nikomedes installing his own son as king, but with the royal Paphlagonian name Pylaimenes. Not only did Mithridates pay no attention, he also occupied Galatia, Justinus (37.4.6) claims. As a bald statement, we can scarcely imagine Eupator occupying all of Galatia. Strobel explains the statement away: Eupator was anxious to protect the vulnerable west flank of Kappadokia, and perhaps Justinus' statement refers to diplomatic negotiations with the neighbouring Galatians.[26] That seems a possibility, but it is interesting to note that whatever it was Eupator did, Justinus explains it as another act of defiance towards the Roman ambassadors, who go home having been made fools of.

The next escalation is in Kappadokia. Nikomedes and Mithridates' sister, Laodike, make an alliance and take control of Kappadokia, but are expelled by Eupator, and Ariarathes VII restored. But this time Eupator insists on Gordios being received back. When Ariarathes refuses, Mithridates murders him, and copies Nikomedes' action in Paphlagonia by giving one of his own sons the Kappadokian royal name and installing him as Ariarathes IX with Gordios as *rector* (Just. *Epit.* 38.1). This is definitely one step further than simply continuing to control the country indirectly. And Mithridates does not seem to have been hesitant about throwing his weight around. When the legitimate claimant to the Kappadokian throne, Ariarathes VIII, sought to return, Mithridates sent an army to drive him off (*proelium renovat* – Just. *Epit.* 38.2.2). This was all beginning to attract Roman attention, and the manifestation of this growing concern was Marius' mission to the East in 99/98 BC. It has very much the same sort of feel about it as the "diplomacy" of C. Popillius Laenas in Egypt in 168 BC. The story, as it is told in Plutarch (*Mar.* 31.2-3), does not make a direct link between the mission and Pontic defiance of specific Roman orders; but once Nikomedes stirred the pot by claiming in Rome through Laodike that Ariarathes IX was not the legitimate king of Kappadokia, but that his candidate was, Mithridates' was, temporarily, stymied (Just. *Epit.* 38.2.3-4). Both kings were ordered out of Paphlagonia and Kappadokia. Eupator had just heard Marius' warning to be stronger than Rome or obey her orders, he had no ally in Asia Minor, and there was nothing distracting Roman attention elsewhere. Defiance would be foolish, so he complied. This was a clear decision to back off, but there is nothing about it that requires the conclusion that

it was based on an understanding of his position as a compliant Hellenistic king, who respected Roman dominance: it was simply a pragmatic decision, just like that of Antiochos IV in 167 BC, not to confront Rome on this particular occasion. He had pushed and found that he had come close to the limits of what was possible without war.

If he had genuinely wanted to avoid war with Rome, then his subsequent actions are impossible to understand. For, recognising the limits of his power, this was surely the time to rein in his ambitions and cool the temperature of his relationship with Rome. But he did the opposite: he continued to agitate. He immediately made an alliance with Tigranes of Armenia and, through Gordios persuaded him to invade Kappadokia and restore Ariarathes IX (Just. *Epit.* 38.3.1-3). This was exactly the same sort of meddling he had been doing before: he could not possibly have thought that he would get away with restoring Ariarathes IX and Gordios. So why do it? It can only be intentional provocation. The response was the sending of an army, under Sulla's command, to restore Ariobarzanes to the throne of Kappadokia.[27] Sulla's expedition was nothing short of sensational. There had not been a single occasion in the post-Apameia world when Rome had intervened militarily in the intrigues of the Anatolian kings. It is clear evidence that Rome had lost patience and would not countenance Mithridatic defiance; and its import must have been crystal-clear to Mithridates: Kappadokia was off-limits and any attempt to gain control of it would meet with an armed response. Eupator's Kappadokian policy had now reached an impasse. He had been threatened and had backed off; he had pressed further and Rome had sent an army. This was a decisive moment. In that moment there may be a clue as to how Mithridates' mind was working. For Frontinus reports (*Str.* 1.5.18) that Sulla had to fight against Eupator's general Archelaos in Kappadokia. It is a very brief notice without further contextual explanation, but if it is to be believed, Mithridates was only a hair's breadth away from direct military defiance of Rome.

Confirmation of his aggressive intentions is again provided by his next actions. After organising an assassination attempt on Nikomedes IV of Bithynia that failed (App. *Mith.* 57), he sent Sokrates Chrestos, a pretender to the Bithynian throne, to expel him and also secured the expulsion, again, of Ariobarzanes (Just. *Epit.* 38.3.4; App. *Mith.* 10). The armed expedition of Manius Aquillius to restore the kings of Bithynia and Kappadokia resulted. Strobel's claim that "Mithridates was evidently surprised and impressed by this determined Roman conduct" seems incredible to me.[28] Even if you argue that Sulla's expedition installed for the first time, rather than restored, Ariobarzanes, Mithridates must have known he could not get away with directly overturning Sulla's arrangements – arrangements put in place with armed force. In the light of this repeated provocation, Appianos' interpretation of Mithridates' war plans gains credence. To be sure, when Nikomedes and Ariobarzanes are restored Mithridates backs off again, and yet again, when Nikomedes is forced into a plundering raid on Pontos. But this was all just

a pretence, Appianos maintains: Eupator was really storing up "many and just complaints for war". He takes possession of Kappadokia for one last time and sends Pelopidas off with a justification and offer of negotiation that he knew would be rejected. From a king truly seeking to avoid conflict with Rome, this repeated provocation is inexplicable. His apparent compliance in stepping back from the precipice on a number of occasions was precisely that – apparent. In reality he wanted war, but war on his terms, which were that Rome should be seen to be the aggressor and Pontos the aggrieved party: this would win him support in Asia for the major war he was now well prepared for. With victory over Manius Aquillius, the die was cast. Strobel has argued that the irrevocable break with Rome came only with the invasion of Asia, or with the Asian Vespers.[29] But if there was one clear lesson to be learnt in the post-Apameia world, it was that Rome would respond to warfare directed against her with uncompromising violence. A military response to the defeat of Manius Aquillius was a certainty, as Mithridates must have known.

Mithridates' ambitious forward planning is also indicated by the subsequent course of the war. He occupied Kappadokia and Bithynia, then overran the Roman province, besieged Rhodes (unsuccessfully), slaughtered thousands of Romans and spread out over the rest of Asia before launching an invasion of Greece. Logistically, these were extremely demanding operations. There can be no doubt that he was well aware of the timing, that Rome could do nothing about him until the Social War in Italy had been won, but can we attribute all these Pontic campaigns solely to spontaneous opportunism? Huge forces were needed for these operations that could not be collected on the spur of the moment: a number of different army groups had to be recruited, fleets had to be built. This all took time. If he did not have ambitions that went beyond protecting Pontos and meddling in Kappadokia and Bithynia, careful to avoid conflict with Rome, how did it come about that he had such forces available? Sulla makes exactly this point (in the speech Appianos gives him – *Mith.* 57) and it is difficult to refute.

Mithridates' relationship with Alexander the Great is also revealing of his ambitious nature. Justinus (38.7.1) says Mithridates traced his maternal line to Alexander and Seleukos; and, however bogus this claim, in the course of the conflicts with Rome the sources report actions of his that were designed to recall Alexander. At the beginning of the first war, for instance, he lodged at an inn where Alexander had once stayed (App. *Mith.* 20); he copied Alexander in giving money to Apameia for earthquake repairs (Strab. 12.8.18), and in extending the sacred precinct of the temple of Artemis at Ephesos (Strab. 14.1.23); when wounded in battle he showed himself to his troops as Alexander had done (App. *Mith.* 89); and on his death he had in his possession Alexander's cloak (App. *Mith.* 117). To be sure, this could all be retrospective myth-making by later authorities; or if true, it might simply be that the attractions of Alexander as a model occurred to Mithridates once he had actually launched his invasion of Asia. One type of source material, however, argues

against such an interpretation – the royal coins: they seem to show that Alexander was already on Mithridates' mind by 95 BC.

The dated royal issues starting in 95 BC, clearly represent Mithridates as an Alexander figure. Fifty years ago Kleiner traced the heritage of the portrait back through the Roman provincial issues of Macedonia to the various "Lysimachean" coinages.[30] A glance at the plates of the Lysimachean types in F. de Callataÿ's important study (plates 32-39) demonstrates that there is no need to revise Kleiner's opinion: Mithridates was consciously placing his portrait in the Alexander tradition.[31] It is interesting to note that the portrait on some of the later Alexander and Lysimachos issues from Black Sea cities (Odessos, Mesembria, Istros, Tomis, Kallatis, Byzantion) is so Mithridatic-like that scholars have long assumed Eupator is the man depicted: this would then reflect the extension of the king's power to these areas. Callataÿ has argued strenuously against this.[32] Even if he is right, the similarity between the Alexander and Mithridates portraits is so striking that commentators have confused them: there can be little doubt about the dominating influence on Mithridates of the Alexander images. It is important to note that Eupator was also breaking with recent tradition in the Pontic royal house. The coinage of his father, Mithridates V Euergetes, is represented by a sole surviving coin (Callataÿ 1997, plate 50, no. P), which depicts Euergetes in a very similar manner to what we see on the coins of his uncle, Mithridates IV Philopator. Both are somewhat softer than the harsh and distinctly unromantic image that Pharnakes presented on his coins.[33] Eupator's portrait is radically different from all this: he wanted to present a new message on his coins, and the way in which the royal portrait now reflects the long, flowing hair and distant gaze of Alexander's portraiture makes it clear what he had in mind. By 95 BC, then, we can be sure that Mithridates was already aligning himself with Alexander; and probably even earlier: the same sort of portrait appears on undated coins of his, almost certainly from earlier in his reign.[34] With Dareios, Xerxes and Alexander the Great as ancestors, or merely claimed as ancestors, this was a king with glorious deeds in mind well before his break with Rome.

If coin types give support to the idea of an ambitious conqueror, the actual sequence of Mithridates' minting (his coins conveniently bear both year and month indicator) can be taken, although in my opinion mistakenly, to show the opposite. For although the royal issues start in May 95 BC, the pace of minting is quite slow until May and June 89, when there is a sudden surge. Callataÿ argues that this shows how Mithridates was taken by surprise by the beginning of the war and his mints forced into sudden and unexpected production. Before the third war, on the other hand, the big increase in output that occurs in 75 and 74 shows Mithridates preparing in plenty of time the invasion that he launches in 73.[35] I have explained in detail elsewhere why I do not believe you can draw such precise conclusions from minting patterns alone, why the equivalence between events and coining cannot be

that close.[36] This is not the place to repeat those arguments, but in summary, the problem lies with absences. Mithridates V Euergetes, for example, seems scarcely to have minted at all in his reign, but we know he recruited mercenaries in Thrace, Greece and Crete (Strab. 10.4.10), and he must have paid them. There is to all intents and purposes no numismatic evidence of Mithridates' extensive campaigns in the Black Sea region. After the first war and before the second, Appianos tells us (*Mith.* 64), Eupator prepared for war with the Kolchians and tribes of the Kimmerian Bosporos. So large were the fleet and army he prepared that the suspicion grew they were aimed against Rome. There is no numismatic evidence of these huge military preparations. During the series of mostly minor disputes with Murena in 83 and 82 BC, known as the Second Mithridatic War, there was one serious battle when Mithridates drew up a large army and inflicted a sharp defeat on Murena (App. *Mith.* 65); but there is very little coining in 83, and none at all in 82. Immediately after that, Mithridates attacked the Achaians beyond Kolchis and lost two-thirds of his army (App. *Mith.* 67). There is no numismatic sign of that army either; nor of the two huge armies that were defeated in 86 at the battles of Chaironeia and Orchomenos. And after the heavy production of 75/74 BC, Mithridates virtually stops coining, even though he engages in a great deal of fighting in the remaining years before his death.

The obvious conclusion to be drawn from all this is that there is no cast-iron connection between military activity and minting. The amount of money produced by the royal mints was, according to modern numismatic calculations, not even remotely sufficient to pay the number of soldiers reported in the sources;[37] and the varied content of coin hoards suggests anyway that Mithridatic troops were paid in a variety of currencies. When there was no production of royal issues, there was evidently enough money available. That the surges in 89 and 75/74 BC were connected with the First and Third Mithridatic Wars seems virtually certain, but the exact relationship of the coining with events is simply not possible to determine. The logistics of coin production were simple, and when he needed the money the king could, and obviously did, order the royal mints into immediate production. It was not a time-consuming task. Two months of intensive issuing gave him what he required: there was no need to store it up before it was to be used. Even though he was looking for trouble in the years before the war actually started, he had no exact schedule. His armies and his navy were ready. They had to be created well before the beginning of the war, and must have been paid a long time before 89 BC. We do not know in which month the war began, but as soon as the weather allowed Aquillius to manoeuvre his army for an invasion of Pontos, Mithridates finally had the opportunity he had been looking for, and decided that this was the time to strike. When his financial experts told him he needed more money to pay the troops, he ordered it up. Nothing requires the interpretation that a king determined to avoid war with Rome was caught by surprise.

Mithridates Eupator built an empire in the Black Sea, and, manifestly dissatisfied with the extent of his power in Asia Minor, tried to create one there too. The chronology of how his ambitions in Asia developed is not easy to establish. The ancient sources have him as a rabid world-conqueror, determined to confront Rome, from the very beginning of his reign. This is unlikely. When he came to the throne, he continued his father's policy of indirect interference in Kappadokia for a time, and he avoided reckless and unprepared conflict with Rome. But he did also continue to raise the stakes. When Sulla led an army to restore (or install) Ariobarzanes, Mithridates' immediate and long-term choices in Asia Minor were clear: back off, if he did not want to fight Rome; or keep pressing until the right opportunity to do so offered itself. Although Rome was an aggressive imperial power, the main objective of her policies abroad was to win obedience: Marius had enunciated this, Aquillius and his colleagues too – when they told Pelopidas not to return unless the king obeyed their commands (App. *Mith.* 16). The sources make it clear that the king had no intention of complying. His persistent refusal to accept Roman arrangements in Asia Minor, as he well knew, could only be seen by the Senate as provocation; his actions and his preparations are entirely inconsistent with a king who wanted peace with Rome. On the contrary he wanted war, precipitated on his own terms. The sources may pre-date and romanticise this plan – his gradual escalation of provocative actions could be taken to indicate initial caution – but they were right about Mithridates' aggression. And they were right about Rome's aggression too. In this conflict, neither side was an innocent victim.

Notes

1 For earlier views on Appianos, and an assessment of the *Mithridateios*, see McGing 1993, 496-522.
2 See, for instance, Reinach 1895, 110-115; Magie 1950, 206-211; Glew 1977, 397-398; Sherwin-White 1984, 108-131; McGing 1986, 72-88; Hind 1994, 140-144; Ballesteros-Pastor 1996, 81-89.
3 Kallet-Marx 1995, 250-260.
4 Strobel 1996, 55-94.
5 McGing 1986, vii.
6 Meyer 1879, 31-38.
7 Bosworth & Wheatley 1998, 155-164: discussed by Erciyas 2006, 9-13.
8 McGing 1986, 89-108.
9 From various points in Appianos' *Mithridateios* we can identify Ariarathes, Mithridates, Machares, Xiphares, Artaphernes, Dareios, Xerxes, Oxathres, Pharnakes, Kyros. I have elsewhere examined in more detail the cultural characteristics of Pontos: see McGing 1998, 97-112.
10 Among named eunuchs are Dionysios (App. *Mith.* 76-77), Bacchos/Bacchides (App. *Mith.* 82; Plut. *Luc.* 18), Ptolemaios (Plut. *Luc.* 17.4), Trypho (App. *Mith.* 108), Gauros (Val. Max. 9.2 ext 3). References to concubines (*pallakai*) will be found at App. *Mith.* 82, 85, 107; Plut. *Pomp.* 32, 36; *Luc.* 18; and to multiple wives at App.

Mith. 21. Satraps appear at App. *Mith.* 21, 22, 46, and in inscriptions: Welles 1934, no 73; *SEG* 38, 1108. The Nymphaion inscription (*SEG* 37, 668) is discussed by Vinogradov 1990, no. 589; Ballasteros-Pastor 1995, 111-117. Mithridates' mountaintop sacrifices are recorded by Appianos (*Mith.* 66, 70).

11 Sherwin-White & Kührt 1993, 38.

12 On Pharnakes' war of aggression against his neighbours in Asia Minor from about 183-179 BC, see Burstein 1980, 1-12; Gruen 1984, 553-554; McGing 1986, 25-31.

13 Sherwin-White 1984, 134.

14 Strobel 1996, 86-87.

15 For the extensive non-compliance of Greek states with Roman wishes in the period between the battle of Pydna and the Mithridatic Wars, see McGing 2003, 71-89.

16 Welles 1934, no. 61 for the letter of Attalos; Polyb. 33 16.7-8 for Kallikrates' pro-Roman policy.

17 Among the substantial bibliography on this "treaty", see Gruen 1984, 42-46.

18 Gruen 1984, 584-585; Habicht 1989, 356-362.

19 See Habicht 1956, 101-110; Gruen 1984, 586-589.

20 Gruen 1984, 578-579.

21 Strobel 1996, 66.

22 See Kallet-Marx 1995, 223-227; 196-199 for Roman involvement in, and concern about, the area.

23 *IOSPE* I², 402, the date of which is discussed fully most recently by Højte 2005.

24 McGing 1986, 37-38, 82-88.

25 Strobel 1996, 66.

26 Strobel 1996, 74.

27 I am aware that chronological uncertainty in the 90's BC admits slightly different reconstructions of events, but this does not materially affect my argument. The fullest, and best, assessment of the complicated evidence for the chronology of the 90's is now Callataÿ 1997, 186-214.

28 Strobel 1996, 77.

29 Strobel 1996, 87.

30 Kleiner 1952, 79-80.

31 Callataÿ 1997, 4-52, provides the best catalogue and photographs of the Mithridatic royal coinage, but in his integration of the various issues into the historical narrative, does not comment on the implications of the portrait. On the likeness with Alexander, see too Oikonomides 1958, 219-243; Ballasteros-Pastor 1996, 385; Erciyas 2006, 129-131.

32 Callataÿ 1997, 111-112 with 112, n. 6; 145-147; 261. Although he provides a rigorous refutation of the *communis opinio*, I still think he is wrong: for my arguments see McGing 2000, 375-382.

33 For good photographs, see Davis & Kraay 1973, nos. 200-203.

34 Callataÿ 1997, 33-36 argues that they date to the last years of the 2nd century.

35 Callataÿ 1997, 341.

36 McGing 2000, 375-382.

37 Callataÿ 1997, 389-415.

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