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# Germanicus, Artabanos II of Parthia, and Zeno Artaxias in Armenia

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**Summary:** The aim of this study is to analyse the Roman-Parthian relations under Artabanos II and Tiberius, and the political role played by Armenia, focusing on the agreement between the Roman prince Germanicus and Artabanos II. A scrutiny of military and diplomatic measures taken by Rome, Parthia, and minor kings of Kappadokia, Pontos and Armenia suggests a new perspective of the Roman and Parthian policies towards Armenia under Tiberius and Artabanos II. Artabanos II's triumph over Vonones compelled Rome to revise her policy toward Parthia. Artabanos agreed on a compromise with the ruler of Kappadokia Archelaos, a Roman client king, that involved installing Archelaos' stepson, Zeno, on the throne of Armenia. Germanicus' intervention in Armenia in A.D. 18 led to the conclusion of a compromise settlement between Rome and the Parthians, securing over a decade of peace between the two powers. Zeno Artaxias' coronation at the hands of Germanicus was commemorated by the issue of a set of meaningful silver coins.

**Keywords:** Germanicus, Tiberius, Parthia, Armenia, Artabanos II, Archelaos of Kappadokia

## Motus Oriens – Rome, Parthia, and Armenia

In the closing years of Augustus' principate (27 B.C.–A.D. 14) and at the beginning of Tiberius' reign (A.D. 14–37) many problems had accumulated in the lands of Western Asia under Roman control.<sup>1</sup> For Tiberius the issue which was most urgent were Rome's relations with Parthia and the associated Armenian question.<sup>2</sup> In Parthia, several years following the death of Orodes III (reigned ca. A.D. 4–8) were marked by a power struggle of rivals vying for the throne: Artabanos II (ca. A.D. 8–

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<sup>1</sup> For the Roman East under Augustus and Tiberius, see Anderson (1934); id. (1934 a); Seager (2005) 81–83; Wheeler (2007) 239–242; Dąbrowa (2009) 997–1005.

<sup>2</sup> For the Roman-Parthian relations and Armenia in the two first decades of the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D., see Ziegler (1964A) 53–59; Dąbrowa (1983A) 73–104; (2002); Schottky (1991) 61–80; Olbrycht (2013) 36–80.

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39/40)<sup>3</sup> and Vonones I (ca. A.D. 9–11), whom Augustus sent to Parthia.<sup>4</sup> After some setbacks, Artabanos II's offensive in A.D. 10/11 swept away Vonones who fled to Armenia (Tac. ann. 2.3.1.; 2.4.2–3; Ios. ant. Iud. 18.48–50). Now Parthia was united in the hands of a powerful ruler who intended to extend his influence on Armenia. Thus, Augustus' policies toward Parthia proved unsuccessful. Likewise, repeated attempts of the Emperor to reduce Armenia to the status of a client-kingdom resulted „in utter failure.“<sup>5</sup> In his account of Armenia Tacitus recognises the decline of Augustus' Armenian policy (ann. 2.3–4). The R. Gest. div. Aug. 27.2, composed in the final years of Augustus' reign, describes Armenia as a land which had rebelled against Rome. This state of affairs in the Orient was damaging to Rome's prestige and Tiberius had to remedy the situation.

The aim of this study is to analyse the Roman-Parthian relations under Artabanos II and Tiberius, and the role played by Armenia and the kings of Kappadokia and Pontos, focusing on the second decade of the first century A.D. While the agreement between the Roman prince Germanicus and Parthian king Artabanos II leading to the Roman confirmation of Zeno Artaxias as king of Armenia was analysed in some studies, crucial factors that enabled Germanicus to complete his Armenian mission successfully are still a mystery.

## Archelaos, Artabanos II, and Zeno

Rome's client kings and allies were important factors in her policy in Anatolia and the Levant.<sup>6</sup> One of these client monarchs, Archelaos I Sisines, King of Kappadokia, stood on guard for half a century of Rome's interests with respect to Parthia and Armenia. Archelaos reigned starting from 36 B.C., when he had been installed by Mark Antony, until his effective discharge in A.D. 15 or 16.<sup>7</sup> His first wife came

<sup>3</sup> For Artabanos II's origins and his first decade of the reign, see Ziegler (1964) 57; Debevoise (1938) 152; Kahrstedt (1950) 11; Dąbrowa (1983) 44–45; Bivar (1983) 68–69; Olbrycht (1998) 138–144; id. (2013) 55–78; id. (2014) 92–97.

<sup>4</sup> On Vonones I, see Anderson (1934) 278; Ziegler (1964) 56–57; Schottky (1991) 63.

<sup>5</sup> Magie (1950) 496.

<sup>6</sup> The definition of the status and nomenclature of these rulers has given rise to controversy. On the client kings and allies of Rome in the East, see Braund (1984); Sullivan (1990); Kaizer – Facella (2010 a) 16–42, particularly 24–25; Coşkun (2005); id. (2008).

<sup>7</sup> Archelaos I Sisines: Cass. Dio 49.32; Strab. 12.2.11; App. civ. 5.7. Cf. Gwatkin (1930) 7 ff.; Magie (1950) 491; Pani (1972) 91–145, 192–215; Romer (1985) 75–100; Sullivan (1980) 1147 ff.

from Armenia,<sup>8</sup> and bore him Glaphyra and Archelaos II. His second marriage, contracted around 8 B.C. (or several years later) with Pythodoris, widow of Polemo, King of Pontos (Strab. 12.3.29), was another significant move politically. On Pythodoris' second marriage Zeno, her son by Polemo, who was to play a relevant part in Rome's relations with Parthia and in the Armenian question, became Archelaos' stepson.

Old Archelaos got himself embroiled in political intrigue which resulted in him being summoned to Rome and put on trial.<sup>9</sup> Archelaos' plot against Rome must have involved Armenian issues and implied his Parthian connections. Archelaos seems to have conducted secret talks to some rulers in Kilikia,<sup>10</sup> albeit presumably his main objective was Armenia.

In A.D. 17, on the deaths of Antiochos III of Kommagene and Philopator, King of Amanos in Kilikia, there was unrest in both realms. Disputes arose among their citizens whether to submit to Roman rule, or keep the system they had used hitherto (Tac. ann. 2.42.5; Ios. ant. Iud. 18.53).<sup>11</sup>

The trial of Archelaos was a link in the chain of Roman policy the next element of which was Tiberius' proposition to the Senate to provincialise Kappadokia.<sup>12</sup> Kommagene was to be provincialised as well. Germanicus was to put the Senate's decision into effect during his mission to the East.<sup>13</sup>

Parthia and Rome competed over Armenia since the times of Lucullus and the Arsacid king Sinatrukes (70 s B.C.).<sup>14</sup> Following the failure of C. Caesar, Rome supported a series of pretenders on the Armenian throne: Artavasdes IV, Tigranes V (with Erato), and Vonones. None of them was able to rule Armenia even for a few years – all of them either went into exile or perished in a violent death in Armenia.

**8** R. Gest. div. Aug. 27.2; Sullivan (1990) 300, 325.

**9** On Archelaos' policies in the final years of his reign and on his trial in Rome, see Pani (1972) 192–215. Cf. Romer (1985) 76–77.

**10** For the role of Kilikian cities and realms, including Tarsos and Amanos, in the events linked to the Archelaos' affair, see Pani (1970) 327–334; id. (1972) 193–204. That Archelaos had been conducting secret talks and looking for allies is indicated by a record of a minor incident connected with the affair. An official in Kilikia involved in Archelaos' activities was put to death (Philostr. Ap. 1.12). See Gwatkin (1930) 7 ff.; Magie (1950) 1349; Sullivan (1980) 1158 ff.; Pani (1972) 202.

**11** On the death of Antiochos III of Kommagene and Germanicus' intervention, see Facella (2006) 314–318. On Tarkondimotos (III) Philopator II, king of Amanos in Kilikia, see Tac. ann. 2.42. Cf. Wright (2008). Kilikia was in need of Germanicus' personal intervention, and there must have been good reason to raise an arch posthumously in his honour at Amanos (Tac. ann. 2.83.2).

**12** Strab. 12.1.4. Vell. 2.39. Tac. ann. 2.42. Suet. Tib. 37; Cass. Dio 57.17.7. Cf. Speidel (2009) 585.

**13** See Speidel (2009) 586–587.

**14** Roman-Parthian competition over Armenia: Asdourian (1911) 21–84; Chaumont (1976); ead. (1987); Wolski (1983); Schottky (1989); id. (1991); Spannagel (2000).

After a few years of attempts to take control of Armenia (ca. A.D. 11/12–15), Vonones was forced by the Parthians to flee to Roman Syria (Tac. ann. 2.4; Ios. ant. Iud. 18.51).

Having conquered Ktesiphon as well as Seleukeia on the Tigris, and forcing Vonones to flee Parthia, Artabanos II began to address the issue of Armenia, treating it as his top political priority. Armenian grandees (*dynatoi*) gathered under the Niphates Mountain and combined their forces with Artabanos II's army (Ios. ant. Iud. 18.51–52). This constituted a vivid demonstration of how powerful the alliance between Parthia and Armenia was. After his intervention in Armenia (in A. D. 15, or less likely in 16 at the latest),<sup>15</sup> Artabanos gave the country to his son, Orodes. Josephus uses the verb *διδωμι*, which encompasses different manners of transferring rule over a country to someone. Artabanos' son likely became the governor of Armenia (as did Demonax more than two decades later<sup>16</sup>), rather than its crowned ruler.

It seems that Artabanos did not intend to put Armenia under his direct rule; what he probably wanted was a nominee to rule Armenia effectively as a vassal of Parthia but at the same time be acceptable to Rome. Archelaos' stepson Zeno met these conditions. Archelaos and Zeno's mother Pythodoris must have given their support to Artabanos' plan, and hence we should conclude that Zeno became king of Armenia as Artabanos' appointee before the mission of Germanicus.<sup>17</sup> Archelaos' support for Zeno and his scheming with the Parthians must have been the real reasons behind Tiberius' anger and the charges brought against the old king of Kappadokia.<sup>18</sup> The Parthians saw Zeno as a good nominee from their point of view and acceptable for Rome as well. This is the only way to conceivably explain the Armenian deal made between Rome and Parthia in A.D. 18, and the exceptionally amicable atmosphere of the negotiations conducted by Artabanos II and Germanicus in A.D. 19.

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<sup>15</sup> Details of the chronology of events offers Olbrycht (2013) 74–76.

<sup>16</sup> Demonax: Tac. ann. 11.9. See Debevoise (1938) 169–170.

<sup>17</sup> It is Mario Pani who elaborated the idea of Archelaos standing behind Zeno as ruler of Armenia before the mission of Germanicus in A.D. 18. See Pani (1972) 171–216, in particular 175–178, 211–212.

<sup>18</sup> See Olbrycht (2013) 95–96.

## Germanicus in Armenia

Tiberius sent Germanicus, his adopted son and heir apparent,<sup>19</sup> to Syria and Armenia, to resolve the tough problems vexing Rome's eastern territories.<sup>20</sup> The eastern mission was to occupy Germanicus with new challenges. In A.D. 17 on the grounds of a decree issued by the Senate the 32-year-old Germanicus (born in 15 B. C.) was invested with the powers of *imperium proconsulare maius* for 'provinces overseas' (*transmarinae provinciae*, viz. territories lying on the other side of the Adriatic). His *imperium* was superior to that held by proconsuls in the provinces and legates, second to none except Tiberius' (*Senatus consultum de Cn. Pisone patre* [=SCPP] 33–6; Tac. ann. 2.43.1). According to the SCPP Germanicus' task was to resolve the problems in Rome's overseas provinces.<sup>21</sup> The *Tabula Siarensis*, too, says that he was sent out to the provinces and kingdoms of Asia to „bring them to order,”<sup>22</sup> in compliance with the Emperor's commands. He was assigned an adviser and assistant (*adlectus*: SCPP 33, and *adiutor*: SCPP 29) in the person of Piso, the 58-year-old governor of Syria.<sup>23</sup>

In the second decade of the first century A.D. the situation in Armenia was extremely dangerous for Rome, due to Vonones' defeat in Parthia and a zestful Arsacid, Artabanos II, on the Parthian throne, endeavouring to make a comeback to great power politics of Parthia with respect to Rome. Those were the circumstances in which Tiberius dispatched Germanicus to Syria and Armenia. In view of the pressure exerted by Artabanos II and the situation in Armenia, ambiguous from the Roman point of view, one would have expected Tiberius to provide Germanicus' mission with the support it needed in Syria and Armenia. But quite the opposite happened: the Emperor recalled Creticus Silanus, the energetic governor of Syria who had served well in the office and who had betrothed his daughter to Germanicus' eldest son, Nero (Tac. ann. 2.4.3; 2.43.2). This move was a clear sign of Tiberius' dubious intentions concerning the mission of Germanicus.<sup>24</sup>

**19** On the life and career of Germanicus, see: PIR<sup>2</sup> J 221; Bonamente – Segoloni (1987); Fraschetti (2000); Eck (1998); id. (2000); Pigoñ (2008) 287–303; Williams (2009) 117–130; Powell (2013).

**20** The Oriental mission of Germanicus: Questa (1957); Koestermann (1958); Pani (1972); (1987) 1–23; Sidari (1979–1980) 599–628; Gagliardi (2002–2003) 215–235; Seager (2005) 81–94, 219–220.

**21** SCPP 30–31: *ad rerum transmarinarum statum componendum*.

**22** *Tabula Siarensis* frg. a 15–16: *proco<n>s(ul) missus in transmarinas pro[vincias Asiae] in conformandis iis regnisque eiusdem tractus ex mandatis Ti(berii) C(aesaris) Au(gusti)]*.

**23** See Eck (2000) 190; Seager (2005) 219.

**24** Creticus Silanus, who protected Vonones, was the governor of Syria in A.D. 11–17. See Dąbrowa (1998) 30–31.

Cn. Calpurnius Piso was appointed governor in Creticus Silanus' place, and this time Tiberius went so far as to secure the nomination legally by asking the Senate to confirm it (Tac. ann. 3.12), even though he was under no legal obligation to do so. Piso, who had held the consulship together with Tiberius in 7 B.C., must have been briefed by the latter to keep an eye on Germanicus and curtail his powers in military matters.<sup>25</sup> Piso commanded the Roman forces in Syria, and even when given specific orders by Germanicus from Armenia, sent out no legions at all. This unprecedented conduct reveals Tiberius' true intentions: he must have been the one who had refused to give Germanicus military support.<sup>26</sup> Evidently he was apprehensive that with a strong army his adopted son in Syria and Armenia would score yet another success.

A number of facts point to the assumption that the Emperor wanted to deprive Germanicus of military power and get him involved in a conflict in Armenia which would put him in a humiliating situation. If that is how Tiberius wanted things to turn out, he must have reckoned that Germanicus' life would be in danger since he put him in an ostensibly hopeless situation: regulating the Armenian question and inducing the bellicose Parthians to agree to a compromise seemed impossible to achieve if the Emperor's adopted son did not have the required military force.

Germanicus set out from Rome for Dalmatia in the autumn of 17, where he met his half-brother Drusus.<sup>27</sup> The rest of his itinerary led over the Ionian Sea and across Greece (including Athens) to Anatolia. On the island of Lesbos, probably at the beginning of 18, his wife Agrippina gave birth to a daughter, one of the couple's nine children, six of whom survived their father. Germanicus stayed in many cities in Anatolia, including Assos<sup>28</sup> and Ilion, and set sail across the Propontis to the „Pontic mouth“ (*os Ponticum*), viz. he reached the Black Sea (Tac. ann. 2.54.1) and probably sailed along the Bithynian stretch of the coast in the province of *Pontus et Bithynia*. Tacitus writes that Germanicus reached the *extrema Asiae*, i. e. the north-western part of Asia Minor. There is no information whether he continued his voyage by sea along the Anatolian coast. Perhaps he reached the Pontic harbour of Sinope, where an inscription has been found in honour of his wife Agrippina.<sup>29</sup> A town called Germanicopolis was founded near Gangra in Paphlagonia; while Caesarea Bithynica was renamed Caesarea Germanice.<sup>30</sup> There are no explicit signs

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<sup>25</sup> Koestermann (1958) 338.

<sup>26</sup> Eck (2000) 200.

<sup>27</sup> On the stations of the Germanicus' journey, see Halfman (1986) 168–170.

<sup>28</sup> See Özhan (2011A) 170–172 (two inscribed pedestals from Assos, linked with Germanicus' stay).

<sup>29</sup> Pani (1972) 219.

<sup>30</sup> Marek (2010) 410.

of a sojourn in the Kingdom of Pontos in eastern Anatolia (*Pontus Polemoniacus*); however, it is likely that at this time Germanicus conducted talks with the emissaries of Pythodoris, queen of Pontos, whose son Zeno he was to recognise as king of Armenia. Still in the same year, 18, Germanicus reached Syria and intervened in Armenia.

## Military aspects of Germanicus' Armenian mission

As the events show, in the reigns of Augustus and Tiberius Roman imperial emissaries sent on a mission to Armenia faced serious risks.<sup>31</sup> A striking instance is the case of C. Caesar who was mortally wounded in A.D. 3 during his intervention in Armenia.<sup>32</sup>

In the light of past experience in Armenia, we would have expected Tiberius to equip Germanicus with a powerful army. However, we have no reliable information on any armed forces Germanicus had at his disposal.<sup>33</sup> Paucity of source materials is not the only reason for this. Once in Armenia Germanicus sent a letter to Piso ordering him to deliver „some of the legions“ under his own or his son's command, but Piso did not comply (Tac. ann. 2.57.1).<sup>34</sup> If it had been a question of Piso's insubordination, it should have cropped up as one of the principal charges against him in his trial following the death of Germanicus. But no such charge was brought, either in Tiberius' speech (Tac. ann. 3.12), or in the allegations made by Germanicus' friends (Tac. ann. 3.13.3).<sup>35</sup> Evidently the lack of military support was an outcome of the Emperor's decisions and during the trial no-one dared to bring up the point, just as there was no mention of Germanicus' alleged poisoning. It is astonishing that Germanicus, the Emperor's adoptive son and emissary invested with special powers, was sent into a country as dangerous as Armenia with no legions to assist him, while there were four legions stationed in Syria in Tiberius' reign.<sup>36</sup>

Yet it would be hard to imagine Germanicus entering a country as unstable as Armenia with no military force at all. Some historians believe that the military

31 See Asdourian (1911) 65–72; Ziegler (1964) 45–58; Pani (1972) 15–64; Chaumont (1976) 73–84; Dąbrowa (2009) 997–1005.

32 On G. Caesar's mission, see Luther (2010) 103–127.

33 Dąbrowa (2002) 277.

34 It was only after the Armenian mission that Germanicus met Piso personally at Kyrrhos, the winter camp of Legio X (Tac. ann. 2.57.1–2).

35 Cf. Pani (1972) 230.

36 Tac. ann. 4.3. Cf. Wheeler (2007) 241–242.

forces accompanying Tiberius, Gaius Caesar, and Germanicus were not sent from Syria, but came from the Danube frontier.<sup>37</sup> There was indeed an axis of communication linking the territories along the Danube with the Euphrates region, and Danubian legions often served on Asian missions, but we only know of such deployments under Nero, and later under Trajan. Is that what happened in Germanicus' case? Rome had eight legions stationed along the Danube.<sup>38</sup> Theoretically we cannot rule out the possibility of any one of them taking part in Germanicus' expedition. They could have been transported by sea to Anatolia, and thereafter overland across the Kingdom of Pontos to Armenia, but there is no evidence for this. While Gaius Caesar's mission received coverage in the sources and we know that he was attended by the Legio XII Fulminata,<sup>39</sup> there is not a trace of any sort of movement of the legions or auxiliary forces to attend Germanicus.

Could Germanicus have relied on the forces of Rome's client states and allies in Anatolia? In the policy Rome pursued under the late Republic and under Augustus and in the first century A.D. a significant role was ascribed to the armies of her client kingdoms/vassals and allies.<sup>40</sup> Thus, e.g., vassal forces from Anatolia and Caucasian Iberia made a relevant contribution to the fighting against the Parthians under Nero.<sup>41</sup> These instances illustrate the typical mechanisms of Rome's Asian policy in the first century A.D. Whenever the need arose the legions, auxilia, and the forces of Rome's vassals and allies worked together.

For military expeditions to Armenia the key kingdoms in Rome's borderlands were Kappadokia and Kommagene. The client kings of Kappadokia were expected to defend Roman territories, especially Syria.<sup>42</sup> Jointly Kommagene and Kappadokia had a considerable military force. We have confirmed numerical data only for Kommagene, whose king, Antiochos IV, sent 2,000 cavalrymen and 3,000 infantry archers in A.D. 66 to aid Cestius Gallus against the Jews (Ios. bell. Iud. 2.18.9). Kappadokia was a much larger and populous province than Kommagene,<sup>43</sup> therefore it must have been able to furnish a more numerous army. Hence Kommagene and Kappadokia might have put up a joint force of at least several thousands men. However, it is doubtful whether it would have been battle-worthy

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<sup>37</sup> Wheeler (2007) 242.

<sup>38</sup> Seager (2005) 138.

<sup>39</sup> Anderson (1934) 280, n. 1; Dąbrowa (1986) 94.

<sup>40</sup> This happened during Crassus' campaign (Plut. Crass. 19.1, Dio 40.16.1–2), and Antony's war against the Parthians (Debevoise [1938] 121–142 with further references).

<sup>41</sup> Tac. ann. 15.25.3: *scribitur tetrarchis ac regibus praefectisque et procuratoribus et qui praetorum finitimas provincias regebant, iussis Corbulonis obsequi*. Cf. Tac. ann. 13.7.1, 37.1, 38.4.

<sup>42</sup> See Caes. Bell. Alex. 65. Cf. Speidel (2009) 582–583.

<sup>43</sup> Evidence for the economic potential of Kappadokia and its manpower may be found in: Cassia (2004); Michels (2009); Speidel (2009) 581–594.



under Roman command at that particular time, A.D. 18. Germanicus could not have counted on strong support from them, since they were in a state of political disarray following the death of their respective kings (Archelaos I Sisines and Antiochos III), while many of their and other regions' inhabitants were contesting Roman rule.

In view of the domestic turmoil the combat value of Kommagene's army could not have been very high. Likewise, Archelaos's death in unclear circumstances could not have left Kappadokians unperturbed and the loyalty of their troops to Rome intact. It is not certain whether Pythodoris, Archelaos' widow, officially continued to rule Kappadokia after his death (for few months), or whether she was sent back straightaway to her native Pontos, which had itself lost a stretch of its coastline along with the cities of Kerasus and Trapezus to Rome.<sup>44</sup> Perhaps things were somewhat calmer in Pontos itself for Pythodoris may have had a direct interest in assisting Germanicus in view of the substantial role he was planning for her son Zeno. By and large, Germanicus could not have counted on support from Rome's vassals, except perhaps for Pontos.

Following its provincialisation in A.D. 18 by Germanicus, Kappadokia received auxilia forces (Tac. ann. 13.8, 12.49, 15.6) which included the *Ala I Augusta colonorum* and the *Cohors I Augusta*, composed of soldiers from Galatia.<sup>45</sup> Maybe some of these units accompanied Germanicus in Armenia.

One of the units in Germanicus' contingent might have been the soldiers which would form the *Ala Augusta Germanicana*, referred to in Nero's reign as a component of the forces from Kappadokia and Kilikia.<sup>46</sup> Whether Germanicus had some of these troops during his Armenian mission is not very likely, since their combat preparedness was fragile and Germanicus' representatives did not conduct operations in Kommagene and Kappadokia until the mission in Armenia was over (Tac. ann. 2.56.4).

By and large, Germanicus had no legions at all in his army in Armenia and there is no evidence of troop movements from the Danube region to Armenia. Most probably all he had were few auxilia units from Galatia and perhaps some troops from Pontos. It is unlikely that he had Syrian auxilia remaining under the command of Piso. The want of legions reduced the prestige of his mission, while the situation in Armenia certainly called for a powerful army, if there was a risk that the Armenians (or at least a faction of them) would rise up in defiance, and especially if they were aided by the Parthians. Even if the bulk of the Armenians were

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<sup>44</sup> Marek (2010) 412.

<sup>45</sup> See Speidel (2009) 620, 623.

<sup>46</sup> AE 1914, 128 = AE 1966, 472. Cf. Speidel (2009) 620. The Roman auxilia later stationed in Kappadokia may have been created in part from units of the royal Kappadokian army.

fairly friendly towards the Roman commander – which is hardly imaginable at the time –, the country was still dangerous for any intervening Roman force. But this did not prevent Germanicus from penetrating far into the heartland of Armenia, up to Artaxata on the Araxes (several hundreds km from Melitene on the Euphrates). Thus the question arises how it was that Germanicus managed (as most historians believe) to impose the Roman candidate on a defiant Armenia. And how did he manage to neutralise the claims of a then powerful Parthia, which had only recently (about A.D. 15) been threatening Rome with war (Tac. ann. 2.4.3; Ios. ant. Iud. 18.51)?

## Germanicus' success and its background

In the summer of A.D. 18 Germanicus arrived in Syria and quickly marched to Armenia, the main destination of his mission (Tac. ann. 2.55.6). Tacitus (ann. 2.56.1) makes a surprising remark that at the time, since the deposition of Vonones, the Armenians had no king (*regem illa tempestate non habebant amoto Vononei*). It cannot apply to the actual status quo, but must rather be a reference to the Roman point of view, since there was no ruler in Armenia recognised by Rome after Vonones had fled. Tigranes V had been forced to leave Armenia earlier, and queen Erato had disappeared from the political scene, too. Few years before Germanicus' mission the Parthians led by Artabanos II had gained control of Armenia, supported by the Armenian nobility. Artabanos II's son Orodes, who had been installed in Armenia, was presumably not formally a king but a governor. Besides, there is a considerable amount of evidence to indicate that Artabanos put a king on the Armenian throne whom Rome did not recognise at first.

In Tacitus' laconic account of Germanicus' doings in Armenia there is not a single mention of the Parthians. All we learn is that in the city of Artaxata Germanicus crowned Zeno, son of Polemo and Pythodoris of Pontos (and stepson of Archelaos of Kappadokia), who assumed the name of Artaxias (Tac. ann. 2.56.2–3). The circumstances of the coronation were characteristic: the ceremony was attended by the aristocracy (*proceres*) and the people (*plebs*), who voiced their enthusiasm and support for the young king, and hence also for Germanicus. Zeno is said to have imitated Armenian customs from childhood – hunting, feasting, and 'whatever else barbarians practice' (*quae alia barbari celebrant*).

Tacitus writes of a great congregation of Armenian lords, who always appeared at such functions mounted and armed, just as happened in Parthia. Flavius Josephus (ant. Iud. 18.45) records that Parthians took part in celebrations and banquets girt with swords (*machairai*). Feasts and hunts made up a component of festivities such as coronations, and martial equipment was indispensable for the

chase. Whenever necessary the lords would be attended by large companies of retainers drawn from their subjects and vassals (Iust. 41.2.6). Armenian aristocrats clad in armour would appear attended by their ‘contingents and colours’ whenever summoned by the king or governor.<sup>47</sup> A similar rally of Armenian military forces took place around A.D. 15 at the foot of Mount Niphates, when the lords of Armenia gave their support to Artabanos II. There must have been such a pageant for Germanicus. At one moment during his Armenian mission Germanicus demanded legions from the governor of Syria Piso which he never got. This may have taken place at Artaxata, on seeing the armed colours of Armenia.

The attitude of the Armenians towards Germanicus as related by Tacitus is astonishing. Still in A.D. 15 a large convention of lords and princes of Armenia was offering its unanimous support for Artabanos II. Should we assume that within the space of just few years the same magnates as well as the people of Armenia, voluntarily and indeed enthusiastically turned coats to pay tribute to the Roman claimant Zeno Artaxias? True, the Armenians were probably divided in the question of the relations to Rome and Parthia respectively. This is implied by the fact that the expelled Vonones tried to carry on intrigues from Roman Syria and maintained contacts with some Armenian nobles (see below). But Tacitus’ estimation (ann. 2.2–4) leaves no doubt that the prevailing mood was anti-Roman and pro-Parthian.

We know of neither Roman military supremacy nor of any Roman victories or Parthian or Armenian defeats during the mission of Germanicus. At first glance Tacitus’ observation looks incomprehensible, since he does not tell us why Germanicus and Zeno Artaxias received such a warm welcome in Armenia. Where were the Parthians at the time? If Germanicus was as good as unarmed, how could he have scored such a spectacular success? Many modern historians explain this achievement as the effect of his ‘brilliant personality’ or of the ‘very gravity of his personality’<sup>48</sup> – clearly faulty assessments contributing nothing to an objective historical analysis of the situation. When Artabanos reappears in Tacitus’ account in the events of A.D. 19 and is accorded a voice, he shows great respect for Germanicus, and for the next 15 years Parthia withholds from military engagement against Rome over Armenia – the first time this has happened in over a quarter of a century, when either one or other side had intervened at least once a decade. There

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<sup>47</sup> P’awstos Buzand, Langlois (1867) I, p. 216–217 (account of events of the 4th century A.D.).

<sup>48</sup> Mommsen (1894) 375, being aware of the lack of legions in Germanicus’ expedition, claims that the prince ‘forced the Armenians into submission just by way of the very gravity of his personality and his position’ (‘,brachte durch das blosse Gewicht seiner Persönlichkeit und seiner Stellung das Land zum Gehorsam zurück’). Koestermann (1958) 342 stresses ‘die Ausstrahlung seiner Persönlichkeit’ as the decisive factor.

can only be one answer to this conundrum: Germanicus' success in Armenia would never have been possible without a favourable attitude on the part of Artabanos II, and without an earlier deal between Artabanos and Germanicus.

The Parthian favourable attitude to Germanicus is lodged in Tacitus' account, but fails to catch the eye at first glance. Moreover, the significant momentous events took place directly after Germanicus' Armenian mission. Artabanos' attitude to Germanicus at that time was exceptionally warm and considerate. This is shown in the offer of a pact which followed Germanicus' official mission in Armenia, and the mourning announced in Parthia after his death in A.D. 19 – exceptionally telling facts.<sup>49</sup> Artabanos' attitude to Tiberius was quite different, full of threats and invectives, as evidenced in the events of 34–37.<sup>50</sup> All these mysterious circumstances and the surprising political compromise on Armenia can only be explained in one way: Germanicus and Artabanos II must have concluded a kind of settlement which was very advantageous for the Parthians, but also regarded as favourable by Rome.

The preliminaries to the pact must have been negotiated prior to Germanicus' mission in Armenia. He could not have been so naïve as to imagine that his Armenian mission and a potential military clash with Parthia would be easy as pie – only in A.D. 15 Artabanos had still been threatening Rome with war, and it was taken as a real danger (Ios. ant. Iud. 18.50–51; Tac. ann. 2.4.3) – especially as Germanicus' military resources had been drastically curtailed by Tiberius. His preliminary talks with the Parthians may have ensued already during his voyage across the Balkans and, more probably, Asia Minor. Artabanos was watching Vonones' flight into Syria and being informed on the political situation in Rome. One of his earlier informants might have been Archelaos, King of Kappadokia (staying from 15/16 in Rome), who kept an eye on developments in Armenia, or someone from his entourage. We should also consider the part played by Pythodoris, the mother of Zeno Artaxias, who had a vital interest in the objective of Germanicus' mission, and who was also concerned to keep on good terms with Artabanos II. The Parthians were certainly aware of Rome's intentions on Armenia and Parthia itself. Another well-briefed party were the Jews of Babylonia, who visited Jerusalem every year (Ios. ant. Iud. 18.310–313). When Augustus was making preparations for Gaius Caesar's mission, Phraatakes, king of Parthia, and then Tigranes IV, king of Armenia, immediately started up a diplomatic correspondence with the Emperor long before Gaius Caesar arrived in Syria (Cass. Dio

<sup>49</sup> Suet. Cal. 5: *regum etiam regem et exercitatione venandi et convictu megistanum abstinuisse, quod apud Parthos iustiti instar est*. Cf. Tac. ann. 2.72.2; Ios. ant. Iud. 18.206.

<sup>50</sup> See Olbrycht (2012) 215–237.

55.10.20–21). These examples demonstrate that the Parthians had a good intelligence service and were able to act quickly in diplomatic relations with Rome.

Thus we may assume that the Parthians soon learned of Germanicus' mission and started to parley with him, if not in the Balkans, then certainly when he was in Asia Minor. Otherwise it would be hard to imagine Germanicus' mission to Armenia coming to fruition at all without sizeable military resources. Germanicus seems to have obtained from Artabanos a guarantee of safe conduct for his Armenian mission. Germanicus was to endorse Zeno Artaxias' rule in Armenia. The lords of Armenia were pleased with the settlement, because it meant a prospect of peace for their country on conditions which were favourable for them, avoiding a further military clash between the superpowers – Parthia and Rome.

## Zeno Artaxias' ancestry

Zeno Artaxias is the key figure to an understanding of what happened in Armenia in A.D. 18. How was it that this prince, whom Tacitus describes as Germanicus' appointee, was so readily accepted by Armenians, Parthians, and Romans alike? Much is explained by Zeno's family background. He was the son of Polemo I and Pythodoris of Pontos. In contrast to the Roman province of Pontos and Bithynia,<sup>51</sup> east Pontos was a kingdom ruled until A.D. 64 by a dynasty deriving from Polemo I (reigned from 37 B.C.).<sup>52</sup> Polemo I Eusebes of Pontos was a colourful character with an exciting biography.<sup>53</sup> He was son of the rhetorician Zeno from Laodikeia on the Lykos. He became thoroughly familiar with the world of the Parthians, Armenia, Pontos, and the Bosporos. In 40 B.C., Polemo fought, alongside his father Zeno, in the defence of Laodikeia in Asia Minor against the Parthians and the Roman renegade Labienus (Strab. 12.3.14). Later (39 B.C.) he became ruler of Kilikia, and subsequently (37 B.C.) of Pontos. He took part in Antony's expedition against the Parthians in 36 B.C. He was taken prisoner by the Parthians and then negotiated a treaty between Artavasdes, king of the Medes, and Antony (Cass. Dio 49.25.4; Plut. Ant. 36–38). Antony gave Roman citizenship to Polemo.<sup>54</sup> After divorcing Dynamis, queen of Bosporos by the grace of Augustus, Polemo married Pythodoris

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**51** For the history of northern Anatolia including Pontos in Roman times, see Olshausen (1980) 903–912; Marek (2003); Olbrycht (2004); Marek (2010) 364–445.

**52** Cf. Olshausen (2007).

**53** On the Polemo's career, see: Braund (2005) 253–270; Primo (2010) 162–169.

**54** Braund (1984) 41–42; Primo (2010) 163–164. One of Polemo's sons was called Marcus Antonius Polemo, see Dmitriev (2003). The name may imply a close bond of Polemo to Antony.

(Strab. 12.3.29)<sup>55</sup> and had three children by her, including Zeno and Antonia Tryphaina.<sup>56</sup> Polemo was killed in the war against the Aspurgiani on the Asiatic peripheries of the Bosporos (Strab. 12.3.29).<sup>57</sup>

On being widowed Pythodoris married Archelaos of Kappadokia (Strab. 12.3.29) and remained faithful to him until his death in A.D. 17. Afterwards she reigned in Pontos until around A.D. 33. Zeno's stepfather, the astute king of Kappadokia, probably played an important role in his career, and made a salient contribution to the tussle between Rome and Parthia for Armenia.

An inscription from Smyrna honours Zeno, the son of queen Pythodoris Philometor and King Polemo (I.Smyrna 614 = OGIS 377 = IGR IV 1407). He is said to be „the nephew, on the mother's side, of the benefactress Antonia.“ Relying on this evidence, Th. Mommsen claimed that Pythodoris' mother was Antonia, daughter of Mark Antony and his second wife called Antonia.<sup>58</sup> This quite speculative assumption met with strong counter-arguments.<sup>59</sup>

## Zeno Artaxias as a Parthia backed nominee

It is worthwhile quoting Tacitus' account of Germanicus' Armenian mission (ann. 2.56.2–3), which is full of relevant points partly obscured by its author's distanced style:

*sed favor nationis inclinabat in Zenonem, Polemonis regis Pontici filium, quod is prima ab infantia instituta et cultum Armeniorum aemulatus, venatu epulis et quae alia barbari celebrant, proceres plebemque iuxta devinxerat. igitur Germanicus in urbe Artaxata adprobantibus nobilibus, circumfusa multitudine, insigne regium capiti eius imposuit. ceteri venerantes regem Artaxiam consalutavere, quod illi vocabulum indiderant ex nomine urbis.*

If we try to take Tacitus' story at face value we shall have the nagging feeling that there was more to the intervention than meets the eye in this passage and that the historian left certain key points unsaid. So let's scrutinise the main issues involved

<sup>55</sup> Pythodoris: Hanslik – Schmitt (1963) 581–587; Baldus (1983) 537–543; Braund (2005) 253–270; Saprykin (2002) 90–124; Bredow (2001); Primo (2010) 166–178. Pythodoris was the daughter of Pythodoros, a native on Nysa, who supported Pompey and belonged to the most influential potentates in western Anatolia (see Cic. Flacc. 22; 52).

<sup>56</sup> See Primo (2010) 172–173.

<sup>57</sup> Most scholars assume year 8 B.C. as the date of Polemo's death, but it cannot be excluded that he perished between A.D. 7/8 and 10/11. See a detailed discussion in Primo (2010) 168–169.

<sup>58</sup> Mommsen (1913) 264–271.

<sup>59</sup> See Dessau (1913) 691–696; Magie (1950) 257. Mommsen's hypothesis is still shared by some scholars including Chaumont (1976) 86.

in Germanicus' mission and Artabanos' policy at the time on Armenia and Rome. The passage contains an intriguing description of Zeno which tends to be misinterpreted: *quod is prima ab infantia instituta et cultum Armeniorum aemulatus*. Usually it is understood to mean that „ever since infancy“ Zeno had *adopted* and practised Armenian customs and that is why the Armenians readily accepted him. The phrase *prima ab infantia* implies that Zeno had been **brought up** among Armenians.<sup>60</sup> But why should a prince of Pontos have followed Armenian customs since early childhood? The only explanation is that Zeno must have actually **been** in Armenia since early childhood, and had assimilated not only all the Armenian customs (*instituta*), but also the Armenian types of religious worship (*cultum*). Zeno may have stayed in Armenia Minor, situated at the north-western border of Greater Armenia (Strab. 12.3.29) between Kappadokia, the southeastern fringes of Pontos, and the upper Euphrates. Zeno's father Polemo ruled over Armenia Minor since 35 B.C., when this country was given to him by Antony as a reward for his mission to Media Atropatene.<sup>61</sup> Lesser Armenia was then ruled by Artavasdes II, the former king of Media Atropatene (ca. 31–20 B.C.), and by Archelaos II of Kappadokia (since 20 B.C.).<sup>62</sup>

Tacitus presents further circumstances favouring Zeno's candidacy. By using the pluperfect in *proceres plebemque iuxta devinxerat*, he is saying that the Armenians had known Zeno for a long time before Germanicus crowned him.<sup>63</sup> This suggests that Zeno must have been present in Armenian political affairs long before A.D. 18, which ties up with the description of his upbringing.

Tacitus' next key phrase is *sed favor nationis inclinabat in Zenonem* („but the nation's likings inclined towards Zeno“). So Zeno must have been the choice of the Armenians themselves, and of course of the Parthians, even before Germanicus' mission.<sup>64</sup> In other words what Tacitus is telling us in a covert way is that Zeno was king of Armenia even before Germanicus crowned him.

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<sup>60</sup> A similar phrase is to be found in Quint. 1.1.19.

<sup>61</sup> Cass. Dio 49/50.33.2; 44.3. See Sullivan (1990) 162.

<sup>62</sup> See Sullivan (1990) 185.

<sup>63</sup> See Pani (1972) 189, echoed by Balsdon (1974) 224–225: „The Armenians knew all about him, evidently, before Germanicus arrived in the East. In fact he was king already. Germanicus recognized him and placed a diadem on his head.“

<sup>64</sup> Likewise Pani (1972) 175–185, 210–212 who treats Zeno as king of Armenia since A.D. 14/15.

## The coronation of Zeno Artaxias

Zeno's coronation by Germanicus is described by Tacitus (ann. 2.56.3). A brief account of the event is also given by Strabo (12.3.29), but with no mention of either Zeno or Germanicus by name.<sup>65</sup> The coronation involved the placing of the *insigne regium*,<sup>66</sup> in other words the diadem, on Zeno's head, as shown by the passage in Tacitus and on the coins struck to commemorate the occasion, which I shall analyse in due course.

The fact that Zeno assumed the name Artaxias is astounding. Tacitus (ann. 2.56.3) claims that the name was derived from the name of the city, but that is not at all convincing,<sup>67</sup> a dodge probably taken from a politically correct source which tried to obliterate the obvious association. At the time the name Artaxias was highly meaningful in Armenia. It carried a meaning for the Romans, too, and was a clear allusion especially for Tiberius. It was the name of the founder of the Armenian dynasty, Artaxias I (190–160 B.C.), who had concluded a treaty with the Romans,<sup>68</sup> but by the first century A.D. his memory would have been eclipsed by the events of the age of Tigranes the Great (96–55 B.C.), Artavasdes II (55–34 B.C.) and their successors. Zeno's adoption of the name Artaxias must have been a reference to Artaxias II (33–20 B.C.), who went down in history for having massacred the Romans in Armenia to avenge Antony's brutal suppression of Armenian self-assertion (Cass. Dio 51.16.2). Mark Antony ransacked the country and slew its king, Artavasdes II, the father of Artaxias II, who won the Armenian throne thanks to Parthian assistance.<sup>69</sup>

The capture and murder of Armenia's king and the looting of its temples generated a permanent anti-Roman atmosphere in Armenia. Not only Antony, but also Augustus and his successors reaped the bitter fruits of that mindless policy. It was no coincidence that even Tacitus emphasises the Armenians' hostile attitude to Rome: *adversus Romanos odium* (ann. 2.56.1). Artaxias II ruled Armenia with Parthian backing until 20 B.C., when he was assassinated, probably not without Roman involvement, since it happened on the eve of Tiberius' military intervention. So when Zeno took the name of the hero of an anti-Roman resistance

<sup>65</sup> τῶν δὲ τῆς Πυθοδωρίδος νιῶν ὁ μὲν ιδιώτης συνδιώκει τῇ μητρὶ τὴν ἀρχήν, ὁ δὲ νεωστیکاθίσταται τῆς μεγάλης Ἀρμενίας βασιλεύς. Cf. Potheary (2002) 406–407.

<sup>66</sup> In the Roman sources, the *insigne regium* is regularly identified with the diadem, see Tac. ann. 15.29.3, 5; Suet. Tib. 9.1; Vell. 2.122.1; Cic. Phil. 2.5.12; Sest. 27.58–59.

<sup>67</sup> Koestermann (1963) 360 assumes an error of Tacitus.

<sup>68</sup> Artaxias I (ca. 190–160) gained independence after the Magnesia battle. He established a new capital called Artaxata on the Araxes river (on advice of Hannibal). See Patterson (2001).

<sup>69</sup> Pani (1972) 17–23.



movement and an ally of the Arsacids, it was a spur for Armenian pride and a tribute to the Parthians.

## Germanicus' settlement in Armenia

The coronation Germanicus conducted effectively signified Rome's acknowledgement of Zeno Artaxias as the lawful ruler of Armenia. In point of fact Zeno Artaxias had been made king of Armenia in A.D. 15 by Artabanos II collaborating with Archelaos and Pythodoris. He was a good candidate for both super-powers vying for Armenia. Control of Armenia was in the interest both of Rome and of Parthia. Artabanos and Germanicus made a deal according to which the claimant both sides could approve became king of Armenia, and that claimant was Zeno Artaxias, whose elevation to the Armenian throne created the opportunity for Rome and Parthia to achieve a long sought-after balance of power.<sup>70</sup> The compromise Germanicus reached in Armenia opened up a new chapter in Roman – Parthian relations. Nonetheless, many scholars still believe Zeno was the Roman appointee imposed on Armenia against the will of the Parthians.<sup>71</sup>

Straight after describing Germanicus' Armenian intervention Tacitus goes on to mention the legats sent to Kappadokia (Q. Veranius) and Kommagene (praetor Q. Servaeus).<sup>72</sup> Kommagene was annexed to Syria,<sup>73</sup> and Kappadokia became a province under an equestrian governor who had no legions under his command.<sup>74</sup>

Germanicus scored a success which was perceived in Rome as very substantial and contributed to his rising star – the very thought of which Tiberius dreaded. The Armenian question cannot be divorced from the context of Rome's relations with Parthia. Germanicus had demonstrated his considerate attention to Artabanos, carrying out his wishes as regards Vonones. By entering an agreement with Germanicus Artabanos became a player on the Roman political scene, since his support gave Germanicus an advantage over Tiberius. In Roman eyes Germanicus was more successful at exerting pressure on the Parthians and securing Armenia than Augustus himself, not to mention Tiberius.

Nonetheless the Emperor's supporters were not standing by idly. After the Armenian mission Piso publicly rebuked Germanicus for behaving like a Parthian

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<sup>70</sup> Pani (1972) 231–232.

<sup>71</sup> Zeno – „ein römischer Prätendent“: Kahrstedt (1950) 17; Koestermann (1958) 342.

<sup>72</sup> Germanicus' activities in Kappadokia and Kommagene: Ziegler (1964) 58. Velleius 2.39 states that Tiberius subjugated Kappadokia without military actions.

<sup>73</sup> Strab. 16.2.3; Tac. ann. 2.56. Cf. Speidel (2009) 567 ff.

<sup>74</sup> Tac. ann. 12.49.1; Cass. Dio 57.17.7. See Anderson (1934 a) 745; Magie (1950) 495, 1355.

prince (Tac. ann. 2.57.4). This happened at a banquet given by Aretas IV, king of the Nabataeans. Heavy gold crowns were offered to Germanicus and Agrippina, lighter crowns to Piso and the other guests. Piso threw away the crown offered to him and added a diatribe attacking luxurious living.<sup>75</sup> Piso's accusation entailed more than a criticism of luxury, but also an allusion to Germanicus' alleged pro-Parthian attitude.

The confirmation of Zeno Artaxias by Germanicus was in fact a Parthian-Roman agreement. The deal with Germanicus was absolutely advantageous for Artabanos, giving him the time he badly needed to settle other outstanding matters in his own realm. Now the Parthians, effectively as allies of Germanicus, were reassured that their interests on the border with Rome would not be jeopardised. The situation was reminiscent of the deal between Phraatakes and Gaius Caesar of A.D. 2 and its consequences, when Rome acknowledged the authority in Armenia of Tigranes IV, who was really the Parthian nominee – the only difference being that the earlier agreement was soon rendered null and void on Tigranes' sudden death.<sup>76</sup> The agreement on Armenia between Artabanos II and Germanicus most probably applied only to Artaxias III, who ruled until A.D. 34. When Tacitus writes in ann. 6.31.1 of the death of Artaxias and the instalment of Arsakes on the throne of Armenia in connection with the aggressive policy pursued by Artabanos II, he does not mention a breach of any agreements made with Rome.

Tacitus (ann. 2.58.1) mentions an embassy sent by Artabanos to Germanicus who was in Syria after his return from Egypt.<sup>77</sup> Artabanos offered a renewal of „friendship and alliance“ (*amicitia et foedus*) and invited Germanicus to meet in person on the banks of the Euphrates. At the same time he asked Germanicus to expel Vonones from Syria in order to cut his contacts with the lords of Parthia (*proceres gentium*).<sup>78</sup> It was a reasonable offer – Artabanos wanted substantial concessions from Rome, but on the other hand Germanicus was willing to admit a compromise arrangement, since co-operation with Artabanos would ensure him of a reputation for political success, perceived as the vanquishing of an enemy of Rome, and at the same time serve as a feather in his cap in his contention with Tiberius and Piso. At the request of Artabanos Vonones was interned in Pompeiopolis/Soloi in Kilikia (Tac. ann. 2.58.2). Apart from pressure from Artabanos,

<sup>75</sup> See Seager (2005) 86.

<sup>76</sup> Chaumont (1976) 80–82.

<sup>77</sup> In Tacitus' „Annals“ the Parthian mission (2.58) is placed before the Egyptian voyage (2.59). However it seems more probable that the negotiations with the Parthians were conducted prior to the visit in Egypt. See Pani (1972) 183; Halfman (1986) 169–170.

<sup>78</sup> On the treaty between Artabanos II and Rome, see: Kahrstedt (1950) 18; Ziegler (1964) 58–59; Dąbrowa (1983) 102 ff.; Olbrycht (2013) 106–112.

another factor which induced Germanicus to detain Vonones in Kilikia was his intention to sever Vonones' contacts with Piso and his wife. A year later Vonones was killed by the Romans during an attempted escape.<sup>79</sup>

It seems that Germanicus preferred discreet diplomacy rather than big conferences where the adherents of Tiberius could accuse him of succumbing to the customs of the Parthians, as happened with Aretas IV's feast. This is why he was not in a hurry to meet Artabanos personally. For the next 15 years, right up to the outbreak of a new tussle for Armenia (ca. A.D. 34–35), Rome did not succour Artabanos' Parthian adversaries. Neither did Artabanos engage in anti-Roman activity.

An interesting hypothesis appeared concerning the reasons behind Germanicus' success in Asia. Jean Gagé, a French researcher, pointed out Germanicus' interest in astronomy, magic, and prophecies based on data from written sources and an interpretation of one of the most mysterious Roman artworks, the Great Cameo of France. The research led Gagé to associate Germanicus' triumph in Asia with various aspects of religious cults and magic, in which the prince was interested. The Great Cameo of France, especially the celestial section, may echo the propaganda prevalent in the times of Germanicus.<sup>80</sup> Based on Gagé's findings, the Italian scholar Mario Pani claims that Germanicus owed his political success in Armenia to support from the priestly circles in Western Asia. Priests in Asia, as in Iran, were a significant party in the process of legitimizing rule.<sup>81</sup> Germanicus probably knew the rules governing the process and used them skillfully. The episode from Aretas' feast (Tac. ann. 2.57.4) proves how accepting Germanicus was of Oriental customs.<sup>82</sup> However, prowess in cultural and religious affairs alone was insufficient in the grand political struggle for the throne of Armenia. This required diplomatic regulations and a kind of settlement between the two main powers, i. e., Rome and Parthia.

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<sup>79</sup> Tac. ann. 2.68; Suet. Tib. 49.2: *sed et Vononem regem Parthorum, qui pulsus a suis quasi in fidem p. R. cum ingenti gaza Antiochiam se receperat, spoliatum perfidia et occisum.*

<sup>80</sup> Gagé (1968 ■) 35 ff.

<sup>81</sup> Pani (1992) 242, n. 19, underscores the significance of Iranian traditions in Armenia and the role played by Magi in the investiture and legitimization of royalty in Armenia and Iran.

<sup>82</sup> Cf. Pani (1987) 3.

## The royal status of Zeno Artaxias in the light of numismatic evidence

Artaxias III's coronation at the hands of Germanicus was commemorated by the issue of a set of specially meaningful silver coins, fairly rare drachms (RPC 3630) and didrachms (RPC 3629).<sup>83</sup> On the obverse they depict the head of Germanicus and the inscription *Germanicus Caesar Ti. Aug. f. COS II* (consulate in A.D. 18). Their reverses present the coronation scene; Germanicus with a spear in his left hand puts the diadem on Artaxias' head, who is shown with his right arm raised up holding one end of the diadem.<sup>84</sup> Both figures are standing, flanked by the inscriptions ARTAXIAS and GERMANICUS. Both Artaxias and Germanicus wear cuirasses.

Tacitus (ann. 2.56.3) gives the precise details of Zeno's coronation: *Germanicus [...] insigne regium capiti eius imposuit*. The Germanicus coins provide a further important item of information: Artaxias is wearing a tiara, on which the diadem is being placed. Traditionally in their monetary images the kings of Armenia wore a tiara enveloped in a diadem. The Armenian tiara was cylindrical in shape and topped with a few (usually five) peaks. It can best be observed on the coins of Tigranes II (the Great).<sup>85</sup> In the Armenian tradition the diadem was the emblem of monarchical power.<sup>86</sup>

The fact that Zeno Artaxias appears on the Germanicus' coins already wearing a tiara when the diadem is being put on him implies that he was king of Armenia prior to being crowned by Germanicus. The act of having the diadem put on his head by the Emperor's son was only an expression of Rome's endorsement of Artaxias' royal authority. Artaxias' coronation is reminiscent of another, double coronation, of Tiridates, king of Armenia, who was crowned in Armenia by the Parthians in the 50 s A.D. (Tac. ann. 12.50; 15.2), and subsequently in another ceremony in Rome in A.D. 66. Tiridates was put on the throne of Armenia by his brother Vologases I around A.D. 53/54, and only much later, after years of contention between Rome and Parthia, did the Emperor Nero recognise him as the ruler of

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<sup>83</sup> RPC I, pl. 144; Sydenham (1978) p. 32, no. 49 (didrachm); nos. 50–53 (drachms); The RPC catalogue includes 5 didrachms with one obverse die and two drachms with one obverse die.

<sup>84</sup> Kropp (2013 a) 383 assumes that Germanicus is crowning Artaxias with a tiara „by holding it unrealistically by the loose ends of a diadem tied around it.“ As a matter of fact, the diadem is just partially tied around the tiara. Germanicus is placing a diadem on the head of Artaxias but the Pontic-Armenian prince is an active figure holding the other end of it.

<sup>85</sup> Bedoukian (1978) nos. 7–128.

<sup>86</sup> Plut. Luc. 27.1; App. Mithr. 67. On the diadem and tiara as royal emblems in Parthia and Hellenistic kingdoms, see Olbrycht (1997); (2014 a) 177–187.

Armenia and agree to a coronation in Rome. In A.D. 64 Tiridates removed his diadem for his second coronation ceremony in Rome, when he received another diadem (Cass. Dio 62.23.3; 63.3–5). To crown him with the diadem, Nero removed the tiara Tiridates had on his head at the time (Suet. Nero 13.2).<sup>87</sup>

Recently a new type of Armenian coins has been identified minted in the name of Artaxias III.<sup>88</sup> They depict a horse and an Armenian tiara. The latter was apparently a crucial attribute of royal power to Zeno Artaxias III.<sup>89</sup>

On the Germanicus' coins commemorating Artaxias' coronation, both Artaxias and Germanicus wear muscle cuirasses. This type of armor became a kind of a royal attribute among the Levantine and Anatolian rulers of the post-Seleucid period harking back to Alexander the Great.<sup>90</sup> Moreover, the cuirassed statue of a ruler belonged to the repertoire of imperial art in Rome.<sup>91</sup>

The dating of Artaxias' coronation coins is controversial. A few scholars have held the opinion that they were issued on Germanicus' orders.<sup>92</sup> However, H. Mattingly, followed by E. Sydenham in his monograph on the Kaisareian minting house, ascribe these coins to the reign of Caligula, on the basis of style and historical circumstances.<sup>93</sup> In this case style is a doubtful factor as regards dating; all the coins issued in Kaisareia in the reigns of Tiberius, Caligula, and Claudius are similar in style. The historical aspect is distinctly in favour of a dating to the times of Germanicus. Caligula gave Armenia away to the Parthians, and even imprisoned Mithridates the Iberian who had conquered Armenia with Tiberius' support in A.D. 36.<sup>94</sup> Would Caligula have wanted to recall a situation in which his father had formally crowned a pro-Roman candidate to the throne of Armenia, if he himself withdrew from the country? This seems unlikely although Caligula highly esteemed the memory of his father in coinage.<sup>95</sup>

Another opinion has been put forward, dating the Germanicus' coins to the reign of Claudius.<sup>96</sup> Claudius recovered Armenia by force of arms, expelling the

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**87** For the coronation of Tiridates, see Wolski (1987) 167–178.

**88** Kovacs (2014).

**89** A horse was a regular motif on the coins issued by Artaxias' father Polemo in Pontos. See RPC 3802; Krenzel (2013) 13.

**90** Kropp (2013 a) 54. See Cadario (2004); Laube (2006); Kropp (2013).

**91** Vermeule (1959); id. (1964); Stemmer (1978).

**92** Baldwin (1927) 150.

**93** BMCRI, p. CXLVIII; Sydenham (1978) 32. Likewise: RIC 1, 1984, pl. 15.59. Cf. Anderson (1934 a) 747, 1; Magie (1950) 1357.

**94** Olbrycht (2013) 159–166, 174–176.

**95** See, e. g., RIC I 18.

**96** Walker (1976) 44. Despite of some reservations, the RPC 3629–3630, pp. 554–555, places the coins issued in the name of Germanicus under Claudius.

Parthians, hence it would have been incongruous for him to pay a tribute to the compromise on Armenia Germanicus had effected.

In the light of these historical and numismatic arguments the coins depicting the coronation of Artaxias should be dated to around A.D. 18–19. Evidently they were struck on the orders of Germanicus in the minting house of Kaisareia in Kappadokia. The message conveyed by these coins is absolutely unparalleled by any other representation in the history of Roman minting practice – they depict a foreign prince as almost equal in status with the Roman *princeps iuventutis*. The main addressee of these coins were Armenians, but the message was readable to the Romans too.

Recently some coins minted in the name of Artaxias have been published. Two of the specimens bear the Greek legend meaning „Of king Artaxias son of King Polemo and Pythodoris“, identifying the issuer.<sup>97</sup> The legend of the obverse reading „To the Divine Augusti Caesar and Julia“ refers to Tiberius and Livia. The depiction of an Armenian tiara is accompanied by a star and the letter Δ. This type continues in a way coins issued by Erato, depicting the tiara over a crossed bow and arrow.<sup>98</sup> Thus the tiara appears as the major attribute of royal power in Armenia. This leads to the conclusion that the diadem, shown on Germanicus' coins, was perceived by Artaxias just as an additional attribute.

## The Roman view of Germanicus' Armenian success

Tacitus (ann. 2.64.1) writes that in Rome attempts were made to present Germanicus' achievement in Armenia as a brilliant victory: *Simul nuntiatio regem Artaxiam Armeniis a Germanico datum decrevere patres, ut Germanicus atque Drusus ovantes urbem introirent*. Triumphal arches were put up next to the Temple of Mars Ultor to welcome the two princes on their return to Rome: Drusus, who had vanquished Maroboduus, king of the Suebians; and Germanicus, the alleged victor of Armenia. There were to be ovations for them. Concerning Germanicus, the situation is reminiscent of Nero's „success“ in Armenia, when Rome celebrated a victory, while in reality Armenia passed to the Parthians.<sup>99</sup>

<sup>97</sup> Kovacs (2014) 19, types 1–2. The legend consists of abbreviated words in Greek.

<sup>98</sup> Unpublished specimen, see Kovacs (2014) 20, n. 5. Some coins close to the bronze specimens of Artaxias III are known, being probably imitations, with his name intentionally deleted, and with debased legends. They were minted probably in two decades after the reign of Artaxias III and before Tiridates I began his regular issues (Kovacs [2014] 20–24). See Krenzel (2013).

<sup>99</sup> Ziegler (1964) 74–75.

The Roman propaganda was, in fact, ambivalent. As a rule, triumphal arches commemorated military victories. But Tiberius praised in the Senate the *sapientia* that enabled Germanicus to solve the Armenian question without resorting to war.<sup>100</sup>

Suetonius (*Cal.* 1.2) writes that Germanicus defeated the king of Armenia, *cum Armeniae regem devicisset*, where the verb *devinco* meaning „conquer,“ is at odds with Tacitus' account of the peaceful progress of Germanicus' Armenian mission. There have been various attempts to modify Suetonius' text,<sup>101</sup> but it apparently reflects the reception Germanicus' „victory“ elicited at home rather than the actual state of affairs,<sup>102</sup> since there had been no fighting in Armenia.

Germanicus' diplomacy in the East was not fully concordant with the plans of Tiberius, who was very apprehensive of a conflict with the Parthians, a fact clearly confirmed by SCPP 38–40, where Piso is blamed for treacherous measures provoking Parthia: *quod neq(ue) ex mandatis principis nostri epistulisq(ue) frequentibus Germanici Caesaris, cum is abesset, Vononem, qui suspectus regi Parthorum erat, longius removeri voluerit*. Moreover, Piso had allowed Vonones to hold talks with „evil and insolent“ dignitaries from Armenia and was planning to remove or kill the king installed in that country by Germanicus (*quem Germanicus Caesar ex voluntate patris sui senatusque ei genti regem dedisset*). The coronation of Zeno Artaxias is presented as the joint achievement of Tiberius, Germanicus, and the Senate (SCPP 41–45). Evidently the propagandistic success gained many fathers. Finally Piso was accused of inciting a fratricidal war (SCPP 46 ff.). These are very grave charges aiming at Piso's elimination. The SCPP implies that Tiberius, who most definitely stood behind the doings of Piso in Syria, did not rule out the deposition of Zeno Artaxias, but was testing out the ground using Vonones and his scheming with Armenian dignitaries as a device. Tiberius' attitude implies that the coronation of Artaxias III and the settlement concerning Armenia did not match his expectations. Tiberius must have been worried there would be Parthian influence infiltrating into the lands of the Roman Orient, particularly Kommagene and Kappadokia, and indeed the provincialisation of those countries should be seen as an attempt to reinforce Rome's border with Parthia and Armenia. The Emperor certainly wanted peaceful relations with Parthia, and Armenia formally retained in Roman hands. Germanicus secured the required peace, but the Parthians kept their influence in Armenia.

<sup>100</sup> Tac. ann. 2.64.1. Cf. 2.43.1. See Pani (1992) 243; id. (1987) 9.

<sup>101</sup> See Pani (1972) 175–176.

<sup>102</sup> Pani (1972) 175 ff.

## Conclusions

Artabanos II's triumph over Vonones compelled Rome to revise her policy towards Parthia. It seems that Archelaos, king of Kappadokia, and Artabanos found common interests, namely, forcing Vonones out of Armenia and eliminating him from political play. Archelaos (and his wife Pythodoris) aimed to influence the Parthian presence in Armenia by skillfully taking advantage of Kappadokia's unique position between Rome and Parthia.

Artabanos agreed on a compromise with the ruler of Kappadokia Archelaos, hoping it would be acknowledged by Rome. The compromise involved installing Archelaos' stepson, Zeno, on the throne of Armenia. This act had apparently not been discussed with Rome and resulted in Archelaos' revocation by Tiberius and his subsequent fall.

Germanicus' intervention in Armenia in A.D. 18 led to the conclusion of a compromise settlement between Rome and the Parthians, securing over a decade of peace between the two powers.<sup>103</sup> Germanicus confirmed Zeno Artaxias as king of Armenia. In legal terms, Artabanos renounced his claim to Armenia, while Rome revoked its support of Vonones' claim to the throne of Parthia, and Germanicus even had him interned. Thereby the Roman Empire recognised Artabanos as ruler of Parthia. Artabanos now obtained an opportunity to consolidate his authority in Parthia, in which several political factions were struggling for power. Evidently the deal bound Rome to refrain interfering in Parthian affairs.

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103 Koestermann (1958) 342–343; Ziegler (1964) 58.



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