

HORACE AND THE TIRIDATES EPISODE*

As Augustus consolidated his hold on power in the years following his victory at Actium, Rome anticipated a reckoning with Parthia, the powerful kingdom east of the Euphrates ruled by the dynasty of the Arsacids. There was a sense that the two empires had unfinished business. The defeat at Carrhae was seen as a blot on Rome's honor.¹ The depredations of the Arsacid prince Pacorus in the eastern provinces from 40–38 BCE had gone largely unanswered.² And Julius Caesar had fallen to the daggers of the conspirators just days before setting off for the east to launch a campaign against Parthia – a campaign in which Augustus himself (at the time still Octavian) would have participated.³

The expectation that Rome and Parthia would soon come to grips is evident in Augustan poetry, and above all in the verses of Horace.⁴ Not content with merely observing events along the eastern front, Horace had his own prescriptions for action against the Arsacid kingdom.⁵ The relationship of his ideas to Augustus' actual initiatives has been debated. While some interpret certain poems as support of or legitimation for the regime's management of the east,⁶ others emphasize how Horace's aggressive stance on Parthia

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1) Timpe 1962, 127–9 and n. 144; Lerouge 2007, 93–8; Traina 2010, 212–14. See also below on Hor. Carm. 3.5.

2) The victory of Ventidius notwithstanding; see Strugnell 2006, 250–52; Curran 2007; Lerouge-Cohen 2010.

3) App. BCiv. 3.9. On Caesar's Parthian campaign, see Malitz 1984 (esp. 23–4 for continuities in Parthian policy between Caesar and Augustus); McDermott 1982/3; Strauss 2015, 54–6.

4) For the Parthians in Augustan poetry generally, see Wissemann 1982; Meyer 1961; Sonnabend 1986, 197–227; Debevoise 1938, 208–12.

5) See the passages discussed in Seager 1980; cf. Holzberg 2008, 524–5.

6) See e.g. Mommsen 1905, 178–80; Meyer 1961, 64–5; Merriam 2005, 59–60.

was at odds with the more measured and circumspect approach that Augustus adopted in the early years of his Principate.⁷

One contentious intersection between Horatian poetry and Augustan policy has so far escaped discussion. Two passages raise questions about Augustus' management of an incident referred to here as the 'Tiridates episode' of the 30s BCE. Tiridates was a member of the Parthian nobility who fought a civil war against Phraates IV, the reigning Arsacid king. He was driven from Parthia around 30 BCE and fled to Augustus, bringing with him a young son of Phraates IV. The identity of this child is controversial, but he may be the "Phraates, son of King Phraates" of the *Res Gestae*, who along with Tiridates submitted to Augustus as a suppliant.⁸

Horace refers to this Parthian civil war in four places in his poetry, mentioning a "Tiridates" once by name and a "Phraates" twice.⁹ This article concerns the two references to Phraates. Commentators universally assume that these lines refer to Phraates IV, the king of Parthia and Tiridates' opponent. Yet the Tiridates episode may have involved not just one figure named Phraates, but two: Phraates IV and his young son who arrived at Augustus' court with Tiridates. Horace's references can apply to the son as well as the father. Moreover, the presence of the younger Phraates in these passages could have raised uncomfortable questions about Augustus' management of the Parthian east – whether or not this was Horace's intention.

The reports of the Tiridates episode in the ancient sources are an irreconcilable muddle. What follows is neither a comprehensive treatment of the episode nor an answer to all the questions that it raises. It is instead a survey of how scholars have approached these problems, and an attempt to tease out the implications for Horace's poetry if one conclusion – the identification of Tiridates' hostage with the younger Phraates of the *Res Gestae* – is correct. This premise is not ultimately provable; but it is defensible, and its implications are worth considering.

7) Salmon 1946, 11; McKay 1966, 33; Seager 1980, 103; 1993, 38–9; Mattern 1999, 186.

8) *Mon. Anc.* 32.1. See below.

9) Two references not discussed in this article are *Carm.* 1.26.5, which mentions Tiridates by name (cf. Kiessling / Heinze 1908, 130–1; Timpe 1975, 165; Wissemann 1982, 52; Allen 2006, 85 n. 54), and *Carm.* 3.8.19–20, which seems to refer to the ongoing civil war between Tiridates and Phraates IV in 26/5 BCE (cf. Nisbet / Rudd 2004, 124–5).

In book two of the *Odes*, Horace sings of what would seem to be the return of Phraates IV to the Arsacid throne following a victory in the civil war against Tiridates.

*redditum Cyri solio Phraaten
dissidens plebi numero beatorum
eximit Virtus*¹⁰

Phraates is restored to the throne of Cyrus,
but Virtue dissents from the mob and excludes him
from the roll of the truly rich.

Every scholarly treatment of these lines understands the “Phraates” of line 17 to refer to Phraates IV.¹¹ The usual reading then proceeds as follows: the poem praises self-restraint and moderation, arguing that true wealth comes from virtuous living; Phraates has regained the throne of Parthia (imagined here as a continuation of the Achaemenid kingdom founded by Cyrus), a position that confers tremendous wealth; but the king’s lack of virtue means that he is, in reality, destitute.¹²

Another passage in the first book of Horace’s *Epistles* mentions a “Phraates” as the poet recounts recent Roman victories in the east and west:

*Ne tamen ignores quo sit Romana loco res:
Cantaber Agrippae, Claudii virtute Neronis
Armenius cecidit; ius imperiumque Prabates
Caesaris accepit genibus minor.*¹³

10) Hor. Carm. 2.2.17–24. Text and translation from West 1998, 14–15.

11) Not an exhaustive list, but a representative one: Mommsen 1883, 136; Kiessling / Heinze 1908, 179; Nisbet / Hubbard 1978, 47; Wissemann 1982, 68; West 1998, 18–19; Hutchinson 2002, 524; Luther 2003, 16 and n.29; Sonnabend 1986, 255; Quinn 1980, 200; Fowler 2005, 126.

12) On the topos of the Persian king as the happiest man in the world, see Carm. 3.9.1–4; Nisbet / Hubbard 1978, 48. On the Roman conflation of the Achaemenid and Arsacid kingdoms, see Sonnabend 1986, 281 n.85; Schneider 1998, 110–13; 2007, 70 and n.91; Luther 2010, 109; Shayegan 2011, 336 and n.14, with references.

13) Hor. Epist. 1.12.25–8; text from Mayer 1994, 72.

Don't ignore where Roman affairs stand:
 The Cantabrians fell to Agrippa's prowess;
 Armenia to Tiberius'; Phraates on bent knee
 Received the law and rule of Caesar.

Once again, all scholars have understood the *Phraates* here to refer to Phraates IV.¹⁴ And, once again, this identification produces a satisfactory reading. The poem can be confidently dated to 20/19 BCE by the references to Agrippa's campaign against the Cantabrians and Tiberius' against the Armenians. One obvious way to read the Phraates reference, then, is as a comment on Phraates IV's restoration (in 20/19 BCE) of the Roman prisoners and military standards captured at Carrhae – a concession Augustus had extracted from the Arsacid king through diplomacy backed by the threat of force.¹⁵ On this reading, Horace saw the recovery of the standards and prisoners as evidence of Augustus' superiority to his Parthian counterpart.

Yet what if the reader can understand these passages as references not only to Phraates IV, but also to his son, the "Phraates, son of Phraates" of the *Res Gestae*? The viability of this interpretation requires a look at the history of the Tiridates episode.

Phraates IV began his reign over the Parthian empire in 38 BCE by assassinating several family members in order to consolidate his hold on power.¹⁶ The king evidently fell afoul of the Parthian nobility through such behavior, and at some point in the 30s BCE one of their number rose in rebellion as a rival monarch. This usurper was Tiridates, a figure whose origins were a source of confusion even for Greek and Roman authors in antiquity. The Parthians accepted only Arsacids as kings,¹⁷ but no ancient source

14) Wickham 1891, 272; Kiessling / Heinze 1914, 111–12; Morris 1968, 82; McKay 1966, 36; Seager 1980, 116; Oliensis 1998, 189; Luther 2010, 105; Mayer 1994, 202; Brunt 1963, 174; Meyer 1961, 52–4; Wissemann 1982, 73.

15) Campbell 1993, 222–3; Rose 2005, 22. See further below, 316–321.

16) Justin (42.5.1–2; cf. Plut. Crass. 33.5; Ant. 37.1) has Phraates murdering his father Orodes, 30 of his brothers, and one of his sons, although presumably the number of brothers should be reduced to 29 given Justin's claim that Orodes fathered 30 sons among his wives and concubines (42.4.14). Dio (49.23.3–5) also reports that Phraates murdered many of his brothers and possibly also his father Orodes, although the latter point depends on the interpretation of an ambiguous οὐτὸν ἐκείνον. For the view that Dio understood Orodes' death as a patricide, see Facella 2006, 249–50; Fowler 2010, 77 n. 66.

17) See Strab. 16.1.28; Joseph. AJ 18.44.

explicitly names Tiridates as a member of that family. Scholars have hazarded various guesses as to his background.¹⁸ Ultimately, though, one can do no more than speculate.

The main sources for Tiridates' rebellion are Justin and Dio, but their accounts differ. In his discussion of Augustus' post-Actium initiatives in 30 BCE, Dio reveals that Tiridates had recently suffered a defeat and had fled to Syria as a fugitive. Now in Syria himself, Augustus dealt with the conflicting requests of the exile Tiridates and the messengers of Phraates IV. Tiridates was allowed to stay in Syria but received no assistance in his war with Phraates, which he apparently intended to continue. Dio ends the section with a report of a hostage child:

υἰὸν τέ τινα τοῦ Φραάτου ἐν εὐεργεσίας μέρει παρ' αὐτοῦ λαβὼν ἕς τε τὴν Ῥώμην ἀνήγαγε καὶ ἐν ὁμηρείᾳ ἐποίησατο.¹⁹

Having received from him a certain son of Phraates by way of a favor, [Augustus] took the son to Rome and established him there as a hostage.

Dio later revisits the Tiridates episode in the midst of his discussion of events in 23 BCE. The author cites the matter as an example of Augustus' general tendency to treat the Romans as a free people, since the emperor referred the conflicting requests of Tiridates and Phraates' messengers to the Senate; apparently both parties had come to Rome to hear the verdict.²⁰ The Senate left the matter for Augustus to decide. Dio records his resolution:

τὸν μὲν Τιριδάτην τῷ Φραάτῃ οὐκ ἐξέδωκεν, τὸν δ' υἰὸν αὐτῷ, ὃν πρότερον παρ' ἐκείνου λαβὼν εἶχεν, ἀπέπεμψεν ἐπὶ τῷ τοῦς τε αἰχμηλῶτους καὶ τὰ σημεῖα τὰ στρατιωτικὰ τὰ ἐν τε τῇ τοῦ Κράσσου καὶ ἐν τῇ τοῦ Ἄντωνίου συμφορᾷ ἀλόγῃ κομίσασθαι.²¹

18) See Sullivan 1990, 317; Tarn 1932, 835–7; Sellwood 1995, 76. A Greek inscription from Susa refers to a Tiridates as *στρατιάρχος*, which led some scholars to speculate that Tiridates was a military commander before his rebellion against Phraates IV: Cumont 1930, 211–20; Tarn 1932, 832–3; Debevoise 1938, 135–6. But a more recent treatment rejects this interpretation and associates the inscription with a different historical context: Merkelbach / Stauber 2005, 80–1. A Latin inscription from Dalmatia (CIL 3.8746 = ILS 2532) marks the grave of a certain Tiridates' son, a member of the *ala Parthorum*, but there is no way to securely identify the father with Phraates IV's opponent.

19) Dio 51.18.3.

20) Dio 53.33.1: καὶ ἐπειδὴ ὁ μὲν Τιριδάτης αὐτός, παρὰ δὲ δὴ τοῦ Φραάτου πρέσβεις, ἐφ' οἷς ἀντενεκάλουν ἀλλήλοις ἀφίκοντο, ἕς τὴν βουλὴν αὐτοὺς ἐσήγαγε.

21) Dio 53.33.2.

[Augustus] did not turn Tiridates over to Phraates, but he did send back the son he had received from him on the condition that [Phraates] return the prisoners and the military standards taken in the disasters of Crassus and Antony.

Some scholars read this passage as a continuation of the events discussed in book 51; others understand it to mean that Tiridates fled to Rome a second time.²² The text seems to indicate that Phraates IV was eager to recover his child, since Dio has the king sending back the Roman prisoners of war and military standards in exchange.²³ The emperor's policy here once again seems to steer a middle course between the competing Parthian dynasts: Tiridates keeps his freedom but receives no military assistance, and while Phraates recovers his son, the usurper Tiridates remains at large.

Justin too reports that Tiridates fled to Roman territory after suffering a reverse in the civil war. In his account the meeting takes place not in Syria but in Spain, where the emperor is conducting a war.²⁴ This must mean Augustus' campaign against the Cantabrians, which would date Tiridates' flight to 26/5 BCE.²⁵ Justin adds that Tiridates arrived "carrying with him the youngest son of Phraates as a hostage for Caesar, whom, laxly guarded as he was, Tiridates had seized".²⁶ Messengers from the victorious Phraates arrived not long after Tiridates and asked Augustus to hand over both the child and his captor. The emperor returned the boy unconditionally (*sine pretio*), but he allowed Tiridates to remain free

22) Debevoise (1938, 136 and n.44) argues that Dio here continues the narrative of the episode begun at 51.18; on this reading, Tiridates fled to Augustus only once. The more common view is that Dio has Tiridates fleeing to Augustus twice: first in 30 and again (perhaps following another unsuccessful attempt on the Parthian throne) in 23 BCE: Ziegler 1964, 46; Timpe 1975, 158; Rich 1990, 171; Sherwin-White 1984, 322–3.

23) This is true whether Dio's ἐπὶ τῷ means 'on the condition that' or 'with the result that'. The validity of Dio's statement here is a question that is beyond the scope of this article, though several scholars see the settlement of 20/19 BCE as a direct result of Augustus' restitution of Phraates' son. For this view, see Timpe 1975, 164; Nedergaard 1988, 106; Luther 2010, 104; but cf. Ziegler 1964, 46; Allen 2006, 85 n.53.

24) Just. 42.5.6: *ad Caesarem in Hispania bellum tunc temporis gerentem confugit*.

25) Suet. Aug. 20, 29.3; Dio 53.25.2–26.1; Flor. 2.33; Oros. 6.21.1–11; cf. Mon. Anc. 26. For the chronology, see Magie 1920.

26) Just. 42.5.6: *obsidem Caesari minimum Phrabatis filium ferens, quem neglegentius custoditum rapuerat*.

in Roman territory with a generous allowance.²⁷ Like Dio, Justin records that Tiridates received no Roman military aid.

Most scholars reject Justin's statement that Tiridates met Augustus in Spain in 26/5 BCE and favor Dio's account instead.²⁸ Spain would indeed have been a long trip for a Parthian setting out from Roman Syria. Moreover, a number of coins attributed to Tiridates date to 26/5, suggesting Tiridates' possession of at least certain Parthian mints during this time.²⁹ The two authors are not in complete agreement, but the general idea that Tiridates fled to Roman territory with a son of Phraates IV is widely accepted.³⁰

The usual assumption is that the son of Phraates was under guard (*custoditum*) for his own safety, but it is also possible that the child was guarded for his father's protection. Family strife was a recurring feature of Parthian kingship, especially since rebellions against a reigning monarch tended to rally around an alternate member of the Arsacid family. Phraates IV himself was no stranger to this concern; as mentioned above, his rule began with a bloody purge of potential Arsacid rivals. The guard around his son may therefore have been intended to keep the child in rather than potential assassins out – a possibility that is relevant to Horace's poetry, as discussed below.

An apparent reference to the Tiridates episode in the *Res Gestae* may supply the name of the son of Phraates IV who arrived in Syria with Tiridates:

*Ad me supplices confugerunt [r]eges Parthorum Tirida[te]s et post[ea] Phrat[es] regis Phratis filiu[s].*³¹

The Parthian kings Tiridates and later Phraates son of king Phraates fled to me for safety as suppliants.

27) Just. 42.5.9: *et Phrabati filium sine pretio remisit et Tiridati, quoad manere apud Romanos vellet, opulentum sumptum praeberi iussit.*

28) Debevoise 1938, 136–7 and n. 44; Timpe 1975, 159; Karras-Klapproth 1988, 173 n. 3. An exception is Tarn (1932, 832). Luther (1999, 165–7) sees Tiridates' journey to Spain as the second of the two trips mentioned by Dio.

29) On the numismatic evidence for the Tiridates episode, see Sellwood 1980; 1995; De Callatay 1994. Sellwood attributes types S55.1–14 to Tiridates, while De Callatay attributes only S55.7–9 to Tiridates and the rest to Phraates IV.

30) Ziegler 1964, 46 and n. 6; Bivar 1983, 65; Karras-Klapproth 1988, 173; Sherwin-White 1984, 322; Dąbrowa 1987, 64.

31) Mon. Anc. 32.1; text from Cooley 2009, 96.

It seems clear enough that the “Tiridates” referred to here is the namesake of the Tiridates episode, i. e. the fugitive opponent of Phraates IV mentioned by Dio and Justin.³² It is also possible that the text’s “Phraates, son of king Phraates” (*Phrates regis Phratis filius*) refers to the child whom Tiridates handed over to Augustus as a hostage – but this identification is far more contentious. Perhaps the most serious argument against it is the statement that the younger Phraates arrived after (*postea*) Tiridates, while in Dio and Justin the pair seem to reach Augustus together.³³ The fact that this Phraates is named as a *rex Parthorum* along with Tiridates is also problematic, since there is no evidence in the literary sources that Tiridates shared power with the child, or ever intended to.³⁴

Yet there are reasons to accept the identification, as well. First, the most frequently argued alternative “Phraates” does not fit the bill. This is Phraataces (ruled c. 2 BCE – 4 CE), often referred to in the modern scholarly literature as Phraates V.³⁵ Yet there is little basis for calling him “Phraates” unless one assumes he is the subject of the passage here. With the possible exception of a much later Syriac text, no source calls him by this name.³⁶ For Josephus and Dio, he is “Phraataces”.³⁷ To be sure, that name is linguistically a

32) Ziegler 1964, 47 and n. 10; Timpe 1975, 157; Allen 2006, 85.

33) Noted by Timpe 1975, 157 n. 14. The restoration of the word *postea* is sound given the μετέπειτα in the Greek.

34) Tarn (1932) did in fact argue for a joint kingship between Tiridates and the younger Phraates in which the former used the Arsacid heritage of the latter to legitimize his claim to the throne, but this explanation receives no endorsements in the literature.

35) For the identification of Phraataces with Mon. Anc. 32.1, see Gutschmid 1888, 117; Debevoise 1938, 151; Bigwood 2004, 43 and n. 28.

36) *The Acts of Mār Māri the Apostle*, a Syriac account of the introduction of Christianity to Mesopotamia, mentions a king named “Aphrahat, son of Aphrahat” in Babylonia: Harrak 2005, xiv–xv, 39–40, 57–59. Some have suggested that this figure can be identified with Phraataces: Debevoise 1938, 143 n. 2; Harrak 2005, 39 n. 92. If so, there may be some basis for referring to Phraataces as Phraates V. But the evidence is thin. Phraataces could not have been a contemporary of Mār Māri, who is supposed to have been active in the late first / early second century CE. More importantly, the text’s late composition (in perhaps the sixth century CE) and chronological confusion makes it a poor source for Parthian history: see Harrak 2005, xiv–xvii.

37) Joseph. AJ 18.39–43; Dio 55.10.20. Velleius Paterculus discusses the meeting of Phraataces and Gaius Caesar (2.100–1), but calls the former only *rex Parthorum* or simply *Parthus*.

diminutive of Phraates.³⁸ But that does not mean that it was simply a nickname to be used only in informal contexts, and there is no indication that Josephus and Dio understood it as such. The idea that Phraataces fled to Syria (and therefore Roman exile) at the end of his life has likewise gained some traction in the literature,³⁹ but this too rests on the assumption that Phraataces is the subject of *Res Gestae* 32.1. If Augustus intended to refer to Phraataces in the *Res Gestae*, he surely would have used the name by which that king was known in the Greek and Roman world.

One other “Phraates, son of king Phraates” is known from Strabo; he was one of the hostages sent to Rome along with other members of the Arsacid family at some point between 19–10 BCE.⁴⁰ It is unclear whether Strabo’s Phraates is the subject of *Res Gestae* 32.1,⁴¹ but the identification of the younger Phraates with the hostage mentioned by Dio and Justin would not be ruled out even if he were. As discussed above, Augustus returned this child to Phraates IV in 23 BCE at the latest, and it is not unthinkable that he then became a hostage again when his father dispatched a group of Arsacidae to the Augustan court. Tacitus and Dio both report the later death of this Phraates in 35 CE while making the trip from Rome to Parthia to accede to the Arsacid throne.⁴² If this Phraates was the hostage child of the Tiridates episode, he might have been perhaps 70–75 years old at the time of his death – a long life, but not impossibly so.⁴³ The two suggestions therefore do not rule each other out.

Another possibility is to declare the problem insoluble on the assumption that the Phraates of *Res Gestae* 32.1 must refer to a figure of whom no trace is preserved elsewhere in the historical

38) Drouin 1895, 379–80.

39) Debevoise 1938, 151; Bivar 1983, 68; Cooley 2009, 253. Josephus (*AJ* 18.43: *στάσει περιελαιθείς πρότερον ἢ φύναι μέγας ἐξέπεσε τὸν πραγμάτων καὶ οὕτως θνήσκει*) is the only literary source to discuss Phraataces’ death, and he gives no indication that the king fled to Syria.

40) Strab. 16.1.28. On the date, see Rose 2005, 37, with references.

41) Cf. Bigwood 2004, 43 n.28.

42) Tac. *Ann.* 6.32.2–3; Dio 58.26.2.

43) Assuming the child was 5–10 years old at the time of Tiridates’ flight to Syria in 30 BCE – an arbitrary range, but plausible given that Justin (42.5.6) calls him the youngest son of Phraates IV.

record.⁴⁴ Yet even this approach is not as safe or unproblematic as it first appears. Could there really have been a “Phraates” who ruled Parthia at some point during the reign of Augustus who completely escaped the notice of the Greek and Roman authors? While the succession chronology of the Arsacid kings that emerges from the literary sources is not always airtight, it is reasonably secure for the Augustan period, especially when combined with the evidence of Parthian numismatics. Moreover, the reception of Arsacid royalty at Rome was a subject of considerable interest to Greek and Roman authors.⁴⁵ Many sources discuss the later lives of the Arsacid hostages of 19–10 BCE, for example. Augustus clearly felt that the flight of the younger Phraates to Rome was an event important enough to boast of; it would be surprising if all the historians who dealt with his reign decided to ignore it. The complete omission of a fugitive Phraates from the historical record would be unusual given the typical focus of their Parthian narratives.

Our sources offer little information about how the Tiridates episode ended. It is generally agreed that Tiridates seems to have made a second attempt on the throne in 27 or 26 BCE.⁴⁶ The first century CE geographer Isidore of Charax may refer to this confrontation when he reports that Phraates IV murdered his concubines to keep them from falling into the hands of the enemy “when Tiridates, who was exiled, invaded the land”.⁴⁷ But the usurper seems not to have minted any coins after 26 BCE, and the numismatic evidence suggests that Phraates IV was essentially in control of the realm by the following year.⁴⁸ Dio and Justin both state that Phraates IV recovered the son whom Tiridates had taken to Syria. Justin says that Augustus returned this child at no cost (*sine pretio*), but most scholars reject this in favor of Dio’s assertion that Phraates IV was expected to give back the Roman prisoners from the battle of Carrhae along with the standards taken in Parthia’s

44) Timpe (1975, 161) rules out any satisfactory solution. Allen (2006, 85 n. 54) calls the *Res Gestae* Phraates “unidentifiable”.

45) See Nedergaard 1988; Rose 2005.

46) Sherwin-White 1983, 322; Rich 1990, 171; Bivar 1983, 66.

47) Isid. Char. Mans. Parth. 1: ἐνταῦθα γάρχα ἦν Φραάτου τοῦ ἀποσφάξαντος τὰς παλλακίδας, ὅτε Τηριδάτης φυγὰς ἂν εἰσέβαλεν. Cf. Debevoise 1938, 137; Bivar 1983, 66; Tarn 1932, 833–4. But see also Timpe (1975, 160), who points out that the passage does not support a precise chronology.

48) Sellwood 1995; cf. Luther 1999, 166–7.

military victories.⁴⁹ As mentioned above, though, it is unclear whether Augustus sent the child back to his father's care and protection or – given Phraates IV's previous treatment of potential Arsacid rivals – to imprisonment and death.

In the end, the identification of the “Phraates, son of king Phraates” of the *Res Gestae* with the hostage of the Tiridates episode is a tenable view, though not provable or unproblematic. Not all accept it, but many do.⁵⁰

If the identification is correct or even possible, there are important implications for Horace's two “Phraates” references. First, the passage from Odes 2.2, which dates to 25–23 BCE.⁵¹ Horace sings that “Phraates has been returned to the throne of Cyrus” (*redditum Cyri solio Phraaten*). It is possible to understand in this line not only Phraates IV, but also the younger Phraates of the Tiridates episode. Although this child was kept in Rome as a hostage for a time, the sources agree that in the end he was given back to his father. Dio uses the verb ἀπέπεμψεν, Justin *remisit*; the words match up well with Horace's *redditum*. *Solium* here means not the chair on which the king sat, but rather the authority that the chair represented. Hence *redditum Cyri solio Phraaten* may be read as “the [younger] Phraates [has been] given back to the Parthian kingdom”, a reference to the return of the younger Phraates by Augustus to his father, Phraates IV.

The possible evocation of the younger Phraates here might have led the reader to rethink Augustus' handling of the Tiridates episode. After all, the younger Phraates had fled to Roman territory and sought the assistance of the Roman emperor as a suppliant (*supplex*) – or at least that is how Augustus chose to depict him.⁵² For the Romans no less than the Greeks, the supplicated were un-

49) Sherwin-White 1984, 322–3; Luther 2003, 16 and n.31; contra Ziegler 1964, 47. See also above, n. 23.

50) Supporters of the identification: Tarn 1932, 831; Oltramare 1938, 129; Brunt / Moore 1967, 74; Karras-Klapproth 1988, 137; Sullivan 1990, 468 n. 134. Alternate views have already been noted above.

51) Nisbet / Hubbard (1978, 47; cf. Hutchinson 2002, 524) opt for 25 BCE on the basis of the Phraates reference, but precision is impossible given the episode's convoluted source tradition. Presumably word of Phraates IV's ultimate victory did not long precede Tiridates' flight and thus the events recounted in Dio 53.33.1–2.

52) Mon. Anc. 32.1: *Ad me supplices confugerunt [r]eges Parthorum Tirida[te]s et post[ea] Phrat[es] regis Phratis filiu[s]*. Cf. Oltramare 1938, 129.

der certain obligations to those whom they accepted as suppliants; failure to fulfill those obligations could bring opprobrium.⁵³ Horace himself invokes the rights due to the *supplex* in his address to Lyce: “Show mercy”, he begs, “to your suppliants!”⁵⁴ Augustus for his part had to live up to his famously merciful adoptive father. The author of the *De Bello Alexandrino*, for instance, has Caesar proclaim: “I do nothing more freely than pardon suppliants.”⁵⁵ Augustus avoided this policy as long as the civil wars persisted, but in the wake of his victory at Actium he too began to make a point of granting mercy – where possible – to those who asked for it.⁵⁶ If the emperor had indeed received the younger Phraates as a suppliant, sending him back to Parthia would have clashed with this public persona.

Another aspect of the lines seems ominous. *Solium* means ‘throne’, but it can also designate a type of coffin or sarcophagus. In fact, one passage where the word clearly has this meaning is in Curtius Rufus’ description of Alexander the Great’s visit to the tomb of Cyrus. After placing a golden crown upon the long dead king, Alexander “covered the sarcophagus (*solium*) in which the body lay with the cloak that he himself had been using”.⁵⁷ Curtius’ use of *solium* to describe Cyrus’ tomb recalls Horace’s *redditum Cyri solio Phraaten*. The reader may understand here that the younger Phraates has been returned to the control of his father, Phraates IV. But the ambiguity of the word *solium* means it is also possible to hear “Phraates has been returned to the tomb of Cyrus” – that is, sent to his death. As discussed above, Phraates IV had murdered Arsacid rivals in the past. The king’s approach to dynastic politics was evidently known to Trogus, the Augustan author whom Justin epitomized.⁵⁸ Horace may have known it as well. Perhaps he alludes to it here.

53) Naiden 2006, 123–8.

54) Hor. Carm. 3.10.16–17: *supplicibus tuis / parcas*. Cf. Farron 1986, 70; Nisbet / Rudd 2004, 147.

55) BAlex. 70.3: *se neque libentius facere quicquam quam supplicibus ignoscere*.

56) See e.g. Mon. Anc. 3.1: *victorque omnibus v[eniam petentib]us civibus peperci*; text from Cooley 2009, 60. Cf. Dowling 2006, ch. 2.

57) Curt. 10.1.32: *corona aurea inposita amiculo, cui adsueverat ipse, solium, in quo corpus iacebat, velavit*.

58) On Trogus’ life and work, see Yardley / Heckel 1997, 1–6.

At first glance, then, Odes 2.2 seems to depict Phraates IV as a rich and powerful monarch who is nevertheless morally destitute for his lack of virtue. But these lines may evoke the younger Phraates no less than his father. If this is the Phraates who has been “returned to the throne of Cyrus”, then some new implications emerge. The poem implies that Augustus had failed to uphold the responsibilities of a host towards a *supplex* and acceded to the wishes of an unjust Parthian king. It may go even further, suggesting that the emperor has sentenced the younger Phraates to death by returning the child to his openly familicidal father.

Horace’s reference to a “Phraates” in Epistles 1.12 is likewise ambiguous. “Phraates”, the poet says, “has accepted the law and rule of Caesar on bent knee” (*ius imperiumque Prabates / Caesaris accepit genibus minor*). Commentators usually construe *minor* with *genibus* to yield the sense “Phraates, lower with respect to his knees”, i. e. genuflecting and thus showing his submission to Augustus; this reading is followed in the translation above. To be sure, this is likely to have been one understanding among contemporaries. The lines no doubt conjured up the image on recently struck coins of a kneeling Parthian submissively holding out a Roman standard along with the legend *CAESAR AVGVSTVS SIGN[IS] RECE[PTIS]*.⁵⁹

But there is another way to understand the passage, and arguably a more natural way to read the Latin: *Phraates minor* means ‘the younger Phraates’. *Minor* was regularly used in literature of the late Republic and early Empire to distinguish a person from an older figure of the same name, especially a relative.⁶⁰ *Phraates minor* would thus have been an idiomatic way of rendering the name that Augustus in the *Res Gestae* writes *Phrates regis Phratis filius*. The phrase also matches Justin’s description of the hostage child as *minimum Phrabatis filium*, even if Horace uses the comparative rather than the superlative.⁶¹

59) RIC 287; Zanker 1988, 187; Oliensis 1998, 189; Wiesehöfer 2010, 187. For the coins, see further Rose 2005, 23 n. 15.

60) E. g. Cic. Brut. 77 (*Scipio minor*); Cic. Att. 8.9.2 (*Balbus minor*); Tac. Ann. 4.44.2; Suet. Calig. 1.1 (*Antonia minor*). More explicitly, see Plin. HN 35.59: *Fuit et alius Micon, qui minoris cognomine distinguitur*.

61) See above, n. 26.

If the reader's mind is drawn to the younger Phraates, the lines can be read differently. *Genibus* can now be construed with *Caesaris* instead of *minor*⁶² to produce the meaning "the younger Phraates has accepted the law and rule at the knees of Caesar". This would have been an accurate description of the young hostage who arrived with Tiridates, since Augustus received the child as a suppliant several years before this epistle's composition in 20/19 BCE. As with the previous passage, Augustus' claim that the younger Phraates approached him as a *supplex* is important: the Parthian's position "at the knees of Caesar" makes sense given the tendency of ancient suppliants to clasp the knees of the superior man.⁶³ Once again, the reader is led back to Augustus' return of the younger Phraates to the father from whom he had fled – a violation of the rights due to a suppliant.

On the one hand, then, the poem evokes Augustus' recovery of the Roman standards and prisoners from Phraates IV, an event proudly commemorated in coins, art, building projects, and even a triumphal procession.⁶⁴ On the other hand, the reader who sees the presence of *Phraates minor* might have been reminded that this achievement was only made possible by Augustus' restitution of the younger Phraates, a boy whom the emperor had presented to the Roman public as a *supplex*. In Dio's account, Augustus sent back the hostage he had received from Tiridates on the condition that Phraates IV return the prisoners and the military standards taken in the disasters of Crassus and Antony.⁶⁵ From this vantage point, the Roman 'victory' over the Parthians in 20/19 BCE was simply the fulfillment of a bargain. The price for the standards and prisoners of Carrhae was the surrender of the younger Phraates. Augustus was willing to pay it.

62) Cf. Kiessling / Heinze 1914, 111–12.

63) For the positions and gestures typical of a suppliant in Greek and Latin literature, see Naiden 2006, esp. 44–59.

64) Bivar 1983, 66; Zanker 1988, 186–92; Rose 2005. Meyer (1961, 52–4) argues that Augustus specifically tried to market the settlement as a diplomatic rather than a military victory, but this notion is repudiated by Brunt (1963, 174). Cf. Dio 54.8.2: "Augustus received [the standards and prisoners] as though he had defeated the Parthian in a war" (καὶ αὐτοὺς ἐκεῖνος ὡς καὶ πολέμῳ τινὶ τὸν Πάρθον νενικηκῶς ἔλαβε).

65) Dio 53.33.2; above, 308f. and n.23.

How did Horace himself view Augustus' Parthian settlement? One place to look for an answer is the so-called 'Regulus Ode', composed between 27–23 BCE.⁶⁶ The poem passes judgment on the Roman soldiers taken prisoner at the battle of Carrhae and still confined in Parthian territory decades later.⁶⁷ Horace heaps scorn upon these captives: they are accused of shameful cohabitation with "barbarian" wives, of serving in the armies of the Parthian king, and of forgetting their Roman heritage.⁶⁸ They fall far short of the example supposedly set by Regulus, a Roman commander captured by Carthage during the First Punic War who refused to countenance his own release.⁶⁹ Yet the disgrace of Carrhae does not attach to these soldiers alone; all Rome shares in it.⁷⁰ Parthia's escape from retribution is a stain on Roman honor, a blot that is all the more visible in comparison with Carthage's complete and utter defeat at the hands of an earlier (and, the poem suggests, bygone) generation.⁷¹

Assessments of the poem's implications for Roman eastern policy have varied, but many commentators understand Horace's position to be essentially hawkish, a call for action against Parthia to rectify the shame incurred at Carrhae.⁷² The first lines of the poem seem to hint at what such action entails: "Augustus will be held a god manifest once the Britons and the formidable Persians have been added to the empire."⁷³ But the reality of Augustus' eastern policy fell far short of further conquest. The settlement of 20/

66) Carm. 3.5. The poem is conventionally dated to 27 BCE, but Luther (2003) argues for 23 BCE.

67) Around 10,000 Romans were taken captive at Carrhae; some were transported to Antiocheia Margiana / Merv (present day Turkmenistan) in the eastern Parthian territories: Plut. Crass. 31.7; Plin. HN 6.47.

68) Hor. Carm. 3.5.5–12.

69) On the development of the Regulus tradition, see Mix 1970; Williams 2004; Nisbet / Rudd 2004, 80–1, with references.

70) Meyer 1961, 41; Seager 1980, 112.

71) Williams 1968, 441.

72) For the "hawkish" reading, see Haffter 1938, 144–8; Meyer 1961, 40–3; Timpe 1962, 127; Williams 1968, 441; 1969, 57–60; Mix 1970, 41–2; Seager 1980, 111–13; 1993, 33; Nisbet / Rudd 2004, 82; cf. Lowrie 1997, 243–4. For other readings, see Fraenkel 1957, 272–3; Marconi 1967, 39–45; Arieti 1990; Lyne 1995, 55–6; West 2002, 56–61.

73) Hor. Carm. 3.5.2–4: *praesens divus habebitur / Augustus adiectis Britannis / imperio gravibusque Persis.*

19 BCE amounted to accommodation, not annexation; it achieved peace, not victory.⁷⁴ Moreover, one of the terms of the agreement was Parthia's return of the Roman prisoners taken at Carrhae.⁷⁵ The emperor's bargain with Parthia included the recovery of the very soldiers whom Horace had spurned as degenerated cowards just a few years earlier in the Regulus Ode – a poem that called for their permanent abandonment.⁷⁶

Horace's choice of Regulus as a guiding historical exemplum may have raised further questions about the terms of the settlement. Tradition held that the Carthaginians had sent Regulus to Rome as their messenger to negotiate the release of the Roman prisoners of war held in North Africa.⁷⁷ Horace's own version suggests that these captives were to be "repurchased by gold", that is, bought back by a monetary payment.⁷⁸ In most accounts, however, the Carthaginians had Regulus propose not a prisoner release, but a prisoner exchange: Carthage's Roman prisoners for the Romans' Carthaginians.⁷⁹ Horace's contemporaries were surely familiar with this version of the story, known as it was to both Cicero and Livy.⁸⁰ They might have heard an echo of this reciprocal arrangement in Augustus' eastern settlement, since (at least according to Dio) the emperor returned the younger Phraates to his father in exchange for the standards and prisoners Rome had lost.⁸¹ In the First Punic War, Regulus had advised the Senate not to trade Roman honor for Roman prisoners of war. The Senate listened. In the Regulus Ode, Horace expressed a similar sentiment. Augustus made the deal anyway.

Yet if the Regulus Ode shows that Horace had grounds for dissatisfaction with the Parthian settlement of 20/19 BCE, other

74) Cf. Wheeler 2002, 289; Wiesehöfer 2002, 293.

75) For the inclusion of the prisoners in the deal, see Dio 53.33.2; Just. 42.5.11.

76) Cf. Luther 2003, 16–19.

77) For sources, see Mix 1970, 14–24.

78) Hor. Carm. 3.5.25–6: *auro repensus scilicet acrior / miles redibit*; cf. Williams 1969, 58.

79) Ancient sources for a proposed prisoner transfer are Cic. Off. 1.39; Liv. Per. 18.7; Sil. Pun. 6.348–9; Gell. NA 7.4.1; Flor. 1.18.25; Dio / Zon. Epit. 8.15; Eutrop. Brev. 2.24. This tradition was widespread, but it may not be historical: Polybius preserves no trace of it (1.25–35; cf. Walbank 1970, 92–4).

80) Nisbet / Rudd 2004, 81.

81) Dio 53.33.2; above, 308f. and n.23; cf. Mix 1970, 41–2; Luther 2003, 17.

passages seem to regard the emperor's eastern achievement more positively. Horace might have preferred to leave the prisoners of Carrhae to their fate, but some passages appear to celebrate the recovery of Rome's eagles. An ode addressed to Augustus praises him for having "restored to our Jove the standards wrested from the proud doorposts of the Parthians".⁸² In a similar passage from an epistle to Lollius, the emperor is referred to as "the leader who is now unfastening our standards from Parthian temples".⁸³ And Epistles 1.13 – the poem that follows immediately after the appearance of *Phraates minor* – seems to contain a lighthearted allusion to the recovery of the standards within Horace's instruction to Vinnius⁸⁴ to "duly deliver these sealed bookrolls to Augustus" (*Augusto reddes signata volumina, Vinni*).⁸⁵

These passages seem to show the poet satisfied with the emperor's management of Parthian affairs – the lack of battlefield victories notwithstanding. How can such satisfaction be reconciled with Horace's earlier calls for the subjugation of Parthia by military force? It may be that Horace lowered his expectations for Parthian conquests and accepted – perhaps grudgingly – limits on the eastward march of Roman arms.⁸⁶ But it is also possible that he

82) Hor. Carm. 4.15.6–8: *signa nostro restituit Iovi / derepta Parthorum superbis / postibus*. The emphasis on our Jove may indicate that the Parthians had dedicated the standards to Ahura Mazda: Van der Vin 1981, 119; Kiessling / Heinze 1908, 434; Thomas 2011, 263; cf. Prop. 3.4.4. Thomas (2011, 263) notes that *derepta* here echoes Regulus' utterance at Carm. 3.5.18–21: '*Signa ego Punicis / adfixa delubris et arma / militibus sine caede dixit / derepta vidi*'. For the intertext with the *superbis postibus* of Verg. Aen. 8.721–2, see Putnam 1986, 275.

83) Epist. 1.18.56–7: *sub duce qui templis Parthorum signa refigit / nunc*. Lollius' identity: Fraenkel 1957, 315; Mayer 1994, 8–9. On the "anonyme Huldigung", see Kiessling / Heinze 1914, 169.

84) On the possible identification of this Vinnius with the Vinnius Valens of Plin. HN 7.82, see Nisbet 1959, 75–6; McGann 1963 contra Frank 1925, 29; Johnson 1940. The dominant view is that the *carmina* referred to in this poem (Epist. 1.13.17) are the first three books of the *Odes*: Kiessling / Heinze 1914, 112; Mayer 1994, 4; but cf. Clarke 1972.

85) Hor. Epist. 1.13.1–2; cf. the *signa reddere* of Mon. Anc. 29.2. This allusion was first pointed out by Oliensis (1998, 189–90), who saw it as "an audiovisual trace of Parthia's surrender of the Roman standards". For the lighthearted nature of the poem, see Kiessling / Heinze 1914, 112–16; Frank 1925, 28. But cf. Freudenburg (1999, 479; 2002, 138–40) on the possibly troubling connotations of the reference to the standards.

86) Seager 1980, 115.

saw Phraates IV's return of the standards as tantamount to Parthian acceptance of Roman suzerainty, and thus as a fulfillment of his earlier hopes.⁸⁷ Horace may have simply played along with Augustus' representation of the 20/19 BCE settlement as a military rather than a diplomatic achievement. Then again, perhaps he really saw it that way.

Yet even if Horace's own views are irrecoverable, the appearance of *Phraates minor* in Epistles 1.12 supports multiple readings of the work in the context of Augustan eastern policy. The closing verses of the poem herald the success of the 20/19 BCE settlement, an accomplishment that Augustan propaganda promoted as a great Roman victory. Horace himself may have seen cause for celebration, as some have thought.⁸⁸ But a reader who spotted the "younger Phraates" in the poem might have understood the reference to the Parthian prince as a challenge to the regime's portrayal of events. "I forced the Parthians to return to me the spoils and standards of three Roman armies and to seek the friendship of the Roman people as suppliants", Augustus said in the *Res Gestae*.⁸⁹ But Dio preserves a tradition that held otherwise: Parthia's return of the standards and prisoners was Augustus' compensation for the surrender of the young son of Phraates IV.⁹⁰ It is unclear whether this explanation is true, and whether Horace accepted it. But the presence of a *Phraates minor* in Horace's description of the Parthian settlement suggests that an echo of the tradition was there to discover for those readers who, like the poet himself, were close observers of Parthian affairs.

Can a regime that surrendered a *supplex* son to his murderous father claim the moral high ground? Can the exchange of this child for a mob of cowardly and degenerated prisoners be justified, much less passed off as a victory? Difficult questions about the aftermath of the Tiridates episode may emerge from the allusions in Horace's verses. By evoking not just Phraates IV but also his son of the same name, these passages – intentionally or not – hint at

87) Meyer 1961, 64–7.

88) McKay 1966, 36; Wissemann 1982, 73; Holzberg 2008, 525; cf. Schneider 1998, 106.

89) Mon. Anc. 29.2: *Parthos trium exercitu(u)m Romanorum spolia et signa re[ddere] mihi supplicesque amicitiam populi Romani petere coegi*; text from Cooley 2009, 94.

90) Dio 53.33.2; cf. above, 308f. and n. 23.

aspects of Augustus' compact with Parthia that the regime downplayed or ignored. This settlement was not only a matter of eagles recovered and past defeats avenged. It involved the transactional return of a hostage, the spurning of a suppliant's pleas, the retrieval of dishonored Roman prisoners, and perhaps the acceptance of an inglorious peace instead of a victory won by force of arms.

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Ithaca

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