THE EAST ASIAN JOURNAL OF CLASSICAL STUDIES
Volume 1, 2022: Article

Rome's Strategy against Parthia: Nero's Armenian War (54~63 CE) and The Treaty of Rhandeia[1]

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Abstract

This study re-investigates Nero's Armenian War of 54~63 CE and the Treaty of Rhandeia to highlight the geostrategic importance of Armenia in the context of the Roman strategy against Parthia. Firstly, I will summarize the old debate on the question whether there was the grand strategy on the part of the Roman Empire. Secondly, I will explain the processes of forcing the kingdom of Armenia to be situated in the contact zone (or the buffer zone) between the imperial powers of Rome and Parthia, and the crucial phases of Nero's Armenian War during the first century CE. Thirdly, I discuss the strategic intent to conclude the Treaty of Rhandeia in 63 CE, which was followed by the coronation of Tiridates I by Nero at Rome in 66 CE.

Since E. W. Luttwak's study on the Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire was published, one of the most controversial topics has been whether the Romans had an imperial strategy. There was a certain decision-making group in the Roman imperial court, who were able to 'establish' and 'maintain' a consistent strategy. The *primores civitatis* (foremost authorities of the state), the *consilium principis* (council of the princeps) in particular, acted as the closest advisers of the emperor at times of crucial decisions. Ultimately, it is probable that the military disposition, operation and logistics of the greater empires of Rome and Parthia, along with their frontier and foreign policies, were considered to have been relatively 'strategic' by people of the neighbouring kingdoms and tribal states. In 66 BCE, as the outcome of the Third Mithridatic War, the kingdom of Armenia was driven into the contact zone between the eastern frontier of Rome and the western frontier of Parthia, and therefore it first became to have the geostrategic importance in the Roman strategy facing against Parthia. Rome's foreign relations with Parthia, which had been unsecured after Crassus'

[1] This work was supported by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and the National Research Foundation of Korea (NRF-2017S1A6A3A03079318). This article is an English translation of the article, 반기현(Ban, Kee-Hyun). "로마의 대(對) 파르티아 전략: 네로의 아르메니아 전쟁(54~63CE)과 란데이아 (Rhandeia) 조약." 軍史(The Korean Journal of Military History), vol. 113, 2019, pp. 232-266 (https://doi.org/10.29212/mh.2019..113.7).

defeat and fall at the battle of Carrhae in 53 BCE, were restored by Augustus' peace settlement in 20 BCE. The Armenian question was resolved with the agreement that the Roman emperor would appoint the king of Armenia whom the Parthian king of kings has recommended, but since then in practice the former would appoint the kings out of non-Armenian royal families while the latter often underwent civil wars of the Parthian succession. In 54 CE, the Parthian king of kings, Vologaeses I, raided Armenia and crowned his brother Tiridates I king of Armenia to take strategic superiority over the upper Euphrates. Nero decided to begin war against the Arsacid kings and appointed Gnaeus Domitius Corbulo as the *dux belli* (commander of war).

Corbulo conducted military operations based on the Roman strategy against Parthia. He strengthened the defence of the eastern provinces, restored hegemony over Armenia, and tried to evade a full-scale war with Parthia. However, the war became inevitable when Nero placed Lucius Caesennius Paetus in command to annex Armenia, which resulted in a serious defeat at Rhandeia in 62 CE. Nero afterwards sought advice from the *primores civitatis* and replaced Paetus with Corbulo who rectified the urgent situation and managed to draw up the Treaty of Rhandeia with the Arsacid kings in 63 CE. The main agreement of the Treaty was that the Roman emperor approves of a Parthian prince as king of Armenia, thereby Nero crowning Tiridates I at Rome. In 66 CE, Nero spent a huge budget on holding the clamorous coronation for a propaganda purpose.

From a strategic point of view, venturing into a full-scaled war to incorporate the kingdom of Armenia into a province of either Rome or Parthia was not a good solution to the Armenian question. The province of Armenia undoubtedly would have required much more human and material resources to control and defend the extended borderlands. It was strategically a better option for both Rome and Parthia to maintain Armenia as a buffer state situated in the contact zone between them. The Treaty of Rhandeia in 63 CE was the outcome of both considering their strategic interests. Thereafter, the peace lasted for fifty years until Trajan's Parthian campaigns, but the kernel of the Treaty that the Roman emperor approves of an Arsacid royal blood as king of Armenia was maintained until 252 CE when Shapur I of the Sassanid Persia annexed the kingdom.

Keywords: strategy, buffer state, borderland, Armenian war, Treaty of Rhandeia, *consilium principis*, *primores civitatis*, Nero, Corbulo, Arsacid Armenia, Tiridates I, Parthia, Vologases

Introduction

In 66 CE, Tiridates I of Armenia visited Rome, the capital city of the Roman Empire. His purpose of the visit was to receive the crown symbolizing the royal power of Armenia from Nero. When he arrived in Rome, Nero welcomed him in a fine manner and held a grand coronation. Since 54 CE, Tiridates, younger brother of the Parthian *šāhānšāh* Vologaeses I (51-78), had already been the king of Armenia in practice. However, his enthronement was a serious challenge to the authority of the Roman Empire, who claimed supremacy over the kingdom of Armenia against Parthia. As a result, the land of Armenia was exploited as a battlefield for Rome and Parthia for around 10 years. After going through glorious victories and crushing defeats, the two empires decided to sign a peace treaty in Rhandeia in 63 CE. The main provision of the treaty was to allow the Roman emperor to approve the candidate from the royal family of the Arsacid dynasty of Parthia to be the king of Armenia. Tiridates promised to visit Rome and receive the crown from Nero, which he carried out three years later. Thus, approved by both empires, the first Arsacid dynasty was officially established in Armenia. With the Treaty of Rhandeia and the subsequent visit of Tiridates I to Rome, the Roman-Parthian relations, involving conflicts and wars, met a decisive change.

After successfully conquering the Mediterranean region in the 1st century BCE, the only rival empire left for the Roman Empire was Parthia beyond the eastern frontier. For the Roman Empire to hold hegemony over Mesopotamia, it required a different strategic approach compared to those to the other frontiers, where tribal threats were relatively sporadic and less organised. The situation would have been the same for Parthia. Therefore, the competition between the two empires for sovereignty in the Mesopotamia appeared in an indirect way, of strengthening the influence over the small kingdoms in the borderlands, rather than directly forging military actions. In particular, control over the kingdom of Armenia served as a crucial indicator of power. The Treaty of Rhandeia in 63 CE was a significant event that set a new turning point in such matters. Nevertheless, the 'Armenian question' between Rome and Parthia in the academic field has received only little attention; and moreover, it was never dealt from the strategic point of view of a 'buffer state.'[2]

The lack of research on the strategic approach to the Armenian kingdom can be explained by three main reasons. First, it is not an easy task to find cases where Roman historians deal specifically with Armenia in relation to the border policy. Second, there is academic scepticism

[2] Rome's Parthian policies were generally surveyed by F. G. B Millar and B. Campbell (Millar 1982: 1-23; 1993: 66-68, 99-105, 111-112, 437-481; Campbell 1993: 213-240). Campbell argues that from the Roman foreign policies any plans for strategic and organised control of Armenia as a buffer state are hardly found.

about the ‘Strategy of the Roman Empire,’ or more precisely, the “Imperial defence strategy” itself. Third, the records of Armenian historians that can support these ideas are mostly ethnocentric and religious, which means that they are not reliable enough as the historical sources. In addition, the studies made by the modern Armenian scholars are also based on past records of those unreliable resources. However, a profound study of the Armenian kingdom is essential for a clearer understanding of the Roman-Parthian imperialistic rivalry and foreign relations. Plus, it is necessary to re-examine the Armenian kingdom from the perspective of a borderland or “contact zone” between the two empires, not simply perceiving it as the eastern border of the Roman Empire or the western border of the Parthian Empire. Therefore, this study will be conducted through the verification of Armenian sources and a suggestion of a new point of view.

Armenians produced their own writing system in the early 5th century, and Armenian Christians, such as Agathangelos, Moses of Khorene (Movsēs Xorenac'i) and Faustus (P'awstos), wrote histories of their own nation. Among them, Agathangelos and Faustus composed historical writings dealing with the 3rd century, while Moses was the only writer who told the history of Armenia from the beginning to the end of the 5th century, which allowed him to be referred as “the Father of Armenian History” or the “Herodotus of Armenia” (Chahin 304). The problem with Moses’ work is that it contains virtually n information regarding the Roman-Parthian period. Since this period was the Apostolic Age, particularly important to Christian historians, there may be some narratives focused enthusiastically on the ecclesiastical history (Moses of Khorene 2.27-35). Therefore, it cannot be denied that the reconstruction of this period requires massive dependence on Roman sources. For example, Tacitus’ *Annales*, which best describes Roman history in the 1st century, contains the most information about Nero's Armenian war. Dealing with the same period, the records of Suetonius and Cassius Dio are also essential to examine. By adding recent archaeological achievements and the research of current Armenian researchers (Hovannisian 1997; Bournountian 2002; Panossian 2006; Manandyan 2007; Soultanian 2012; Stepanyan and Minasyan 2013), it is possible to get closer to the truth of this history.

The purpose of this article is to reveal the position of Armenia in Rome’s strategy against Parthia through Nero’s Armenian War (54~63 CE) and the Treaty of Rhandeia in 63 CE that ended the war. First, it is necessary to briefly summarise the controversies over the question of “Did actual strategy exist in the Roman Empire? And if so, at what extent?” Only when this question is resolved, is it possible to move on to the next topic: the Armenian process of “bordering” or becoming the “buffering zone” between Rome and Parthia during the 1st century. Thirdly, the cause, procedure, and the result of Nero’s Armenian war in the mid-1st century will be explained in detail. Finally, the strategic significance of the Treaty of Rhandeia in 63 CE, and the visit of Tiridates I to Rome in 66 CE will be discussed.

The Strategy of the Empire?

The question of whether an actual strategy existed in the Roman Empire has been actively discussed after the book *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire from The First to the Third Century AD* by E.W. Luttwak was first published in 1976. The book was a PhD thesis submitted in international relations at Johns Hopkins University a year before, and he described the 'Roman Empire's defence strategy' by dividing it into three periods: first, The Defence utilizing Client States and Mobile Armies of the Julio-Claudian dynasty from 27 BCE to 68 CE; second, The 'Scientific' Frontiers and Preclusive Defence of the Flavian-Antonine-Severan dynasties from 69 to 235 CE, and lastly, the 'Defence-in-Depth' strategy after the 3rd century. Luttwak argues that the Roman Empire had a so-called "Grand Strategy" to actively confront the changes in the situation in the frontier regions. Responses to his argument have varied in diversity: from a positive reaction which presumed a big wave in the academia to the negative view denoting the anachronistic idea of a non-major (E.W. Luttwak was economics major before international relations) that was not based on any historical records.

This non-specialist's assertion holds a solid position in the academia because, ironically, many scholars have participated in the debate by citing Luttwak and producing productive research outcomes. On the other hand, J. C. Mann, F. G. B. Millar, Benjamin Isaac, C. R. Whittaker, and B. Campbell are the representatives of opposition to his argument (Mann 1979: 175-183; Millar 1982: 1-23; Isaac 1992: 372-418; Whittaker 1994: 49-97; 1996: 25-41; Campbell 2002: 16-21). The main reason for their objection is the absence of a 'strategic decision-making group' that functioned as a type of 'Think-Tank,' which would have established the strategy of the empire and ensured its maintenance. Therefore, historical data in terms of planning and implementation following the strategic consideration is extremely scarce. It is said that the emperor himself or his close associates who would have made a strategic decision were mostly ignorant of military matters. Additionally, they neglected to accumulate information and knowledge about the geography and topography of the frontier, an essential condition for establishing a long-term defence strategy.

However, as the final decision-maker of the military *imperium*, the emperor was certainly not a stranger to the combat field. The emperors in the first three centuries, from Julius-Claudius to Severus (with the exception of Gaius, Claudius, Nero, and Domitian) had lived fully military careers in their youth. In fact, after the 3rd century, the era of military emperors was in place. Members of the emperor's *amici* or *comites* and the *consilium principis*, even the *praefectus praetorio*, *ab epistulis*, *a rationibus*, as well as the senators and *equites* who served as *legati* of the emperor (governors of provinces or military commanders of the frontiers) were aware of the military elements. Most of them served as a *tribunus laticlavius* for about a year in their early twenties, after which they had ample opportunities to pursue a career in the military. By building up the military achievements with the emperor's successor, they could accompany him on expeditions after he had successfully became emperor. These people acted as the "foremost authorities of the state (*primores civitatis*);" and they provided the emperor with the necessary military advice (Mattern 1999: 5-18). In terms of their knowledge and data-gathering abilities, of course, they cannot be compared to those of modern strategists working

at the Pentagon and the RAND Corporation. On the other hand, however, it is also not convincing to conclude firmly that the *primores civitatis* are far inferior in terms of military knowledge or experience.

More importantly, it can be seen as a sort of an anachronism to judge the Roman Empire from our sense of strategic ability. The nation's strategic considerations involved avoiding war in peace, creating wartime resources, and encouraging people not to fight. The Romans provided the logically selected military forces with appropriate incentives and emphasised the advantages for social mobility through a military career. Plus, their regulations on abuse of soldiers' power, the construction of various infrastructures to mobilise the troops, and the creation of propaganda work that stresses the image of the military were the results of their strategy. As such, the operation and deployment of the armed forces that were witnessed in the frontier zones of the empire were no doubt 'strategic' (Ban 2015). Ultimately, the frontier and foreign policies of the great empires such as Rome and Parthia utilized military deployment, movement, and supply, which were both 'systematic and continuous' enough to be called a "Grand Strategy" unlike the standards of the other kingdoms or tribal states that existed in the peripheral area.

The Third Mithridatic War and Bordering of The Kingdom of Armenia

The Mithradatic War was the event that sparked the first clash between Rome and Armenia. At that time, the Kingdom of Armenia was in its heyday under the rule of Tigranes II, who would later be known as Tigranes the Great. The first thing Tigranes did when he came to power in 95 BCE was to annex Sophene in the western frontier and marry Cleopatra, the daughter of king Mithridates Eupator of Pontus. The marriage alliance of the two ambitious men is recorded by several Roman historians as a notable event in the eastern circumstances (Plut. *Vit. Luc.* 22.1; App. *Mith.* 21.104; Just. *Epit.* 38.3.1-2). Having the total control over the eastern front with a marriage alliance, Mithridates boldly expanded his powers westward, and in 93 BCE, with the aid of Tigranes, he conquered Cappadocia and enthroned his son Ariarathes IX as the king. However, when the king of Cappadocia, Ariobarzanes I fled to Rome, it became an opportunity for Rome to intervene in the event. The Roman Senate dispatched Sulla, the governor of the province of Cilicia, to fight and defeat the troops stationed in Cappadocia and temporarily restored Ariobarzanes I to the throne.

Meanwhile, Tigranes II had rapidly and dauntlessly expanded his power to the East and the South. Particularly in 90 BCE, he waged a war with Parthia, where he had been held as a hostage in the past and won a great victory to conquer Mesopotamia. Then, in 85 BCE, Tigranes began to use the Parthian title of "King of Kings" (*šāhānšāh*) to display his elevated status, and he conquered Northern Syria, Commagene, Cilicia, and Phoenicia. Though brief, the territory of his kingdom was expanded to the largest extent in Armenian history, from the eastern Mediterranean to the Caspian Sea. And, around 70 BCE, besides the old capital Artaxata, a new capital Tigranocerta was founded, which was named after the king himself (Movsēs

Xorenac'i 1.30). Tigranes designed the new capital as a city where Greek and Parthian cultures were mutually active. It was accepted that he had inherited the concept of *homonoia* from Mithridates, an ardent follower of Alexander the Great (Manandyan 2007: 46-47). In particular, he forcibly displaced large numbers of Greeks from the newly occupied eastern Mediterranean (Strab. 11.14.15; 12.2.9; Plut. *Vit. Luc.* 26.1). The process of forced migration is also well documented in the records of the Armenian historians: Moses and Faustus, who also reported the migration of Greeks to other cities besides Tigranocerta (Movsēs Xorenac'i 2.16, 19, 49, 65; 3.35; P'awstos 4.24, 55).

Along with the images of gods, Greek culture appears to have been brought to Armenia much earlier in its history (Movsēs Xorenac'i 2.12). The Greco-Armenian-Parthian cultural integration was a prolonged process, while the Roman Empire was quick, armed, and ready for invasion. Given that it was a surprise attack and the Tigranes' forces were absurdly exaggerated by the Roman historians (App. *Mith.* 12.84-85; Plut. *Vit. Luc.* 27.2; Eutr. 6.9), in 69 BCE, it would have been impossible for Lucius Licinius Lucullus might to take down Tigranocerta with his modest force if there had been no irregular collaborators from the city. In that context, testimony was made by Strabo and Plutarch that a large number of Greek actors who had been invited to the theatre made by Tigranes were now employed in a ceremony to celebrate the victory of Lucullus and returned to their hometown with travel expenses (Strab. 12.2.9; Plut. *Vit. Luc.* 29.4).

The Third Mithradatic War began in 74 BCE with Lucullus being actively involved. The war started when Mithridates protested against the bequest of the kingdom of Bithynia to Rome by their king Nicomedes IV. After the death of Sulla in 78 BCE, Rome became an arena for some ambitious senators. For them, the Third Mithridates War was a good opportunity to make their dreams come true (Plut. *Vit. Luc.* 5-6). As the Treaty of Dardanus in 78 BCE failed to end the Second Mithridates War, the pressure on the Roman army in Asia Minor was increasing, and Mithridates was keeping a close eye on Rome's movements. If Bithynia was incorporated into Rome, it would directly face the border with Pontus. Therefore, Mithridates and his troop marched swiftly into Bithynia but were defeated by Lucullus and Marcus Aurelius Cotta who had been sent by the Romans. Tragically, he fled to Armenia in 71 BCE after the defeat, sheltering himself in the kingdom of Tigranes II.

When Cotta returned to Rome in 70 BCE, Lucullus, who was in full charge of the East, sent a messenger to Tigranes to demand the exile Mithridates, but the king of Armenia refused to do so (Phot. *Bibl.* (Memnon) 224.31.2). According to Appianus, Lucullus deliberately sent a hint of reconciliation to conceal his invasive intention (App. *Mith.* 12.83-84). Moses added that Tigranes hurriedly came back from an expedition in Ptolemais in Phoenicia after hearing news of an attack by a thief named Vaykun, which probably refers to Lucullus (Moses Khorene 2.14; Manandyan 2007: 70). Anyway, Lucullus's invasion was successful, and Tigranes the Great, who was defeated at the battle of Tigranocerta in 69 BCE, fought a final battle along with Mithridates at Artaxata in 68 BCE, barely succeeding in stopping the Romans. As the war

continued, Lucullus's army refused to advance further and showed signs of riot, so Rome summoned Lucullus back and dispatched another ambitious leader, Pompeius. He quickly defeated Mithridates and put pressure on Tigranes. Knowing that even Parthia in the east had made an aggressive move against Armenia, Tigranes realised that any further resistance was pointless and eventually made a peace treaty with Pompeius.

Tigranes II maintained a relatively neutral attitude throughout the Mithridates War. Despite this, Lucullus had pursued Mithridates and carried out an invasion on the Armenian mainland and the conquest by Pompeius followed, demonstrating the imperialistic determination of Rome. But, even in the Roman Senate, there were voices criticizing their war of aggression towards the other nations (Cic. *De imp. Cn. Pomp.* 23; Plut. *Vit. Luc*. 33.4). To the ambitious commanders who believed that their military achievement would support their political power, and to the soldiers who decided to be loyal to a capable commander who would take charge of their future rather than the Senate, these words by some senators were nothing but an empty cry. It is a well-known fact that this war of aggression brought Lucullus and Pompeius huge fortunes. And, as Plutarch rightly points out, it is very likely that the tragic fate Marcus Licinius Crassus, who was in charge of the Triumvirate, would face at Carrhae, also originated here (Plut. *Vit. Luc.* 36.7).

The Roman pursuit continued until Mithridates killed himself on the coast of the Black Sea. Then a peace treaty was signed between Pompeius and Tigranes II at Artaxata in 66 BCE. Tigranes was able to retain the throne for another 10 years in return for paying a considerable sum of compensation and continued to use the title of *šāhānšāh*. However, during the Mithridates War, as most of the small kingdoms located in minor Asia and Mesopotamia were absorbed and integrated into Rome and Parthia, the kingdom of Armenia consequently became a representative ‘buffer state’ located on the borderlands between Rome and Parthia.

Nero’s Armenian War

The Armenian Artaxiad dynasty, which had reached its peak during the reign of Tigranes II, ended after King Tigranes IV in 2 BCE. After its fall, Augustus assigned Ariobarzanes from Media Atropatene as the new king of Armenia. Augustus renewed the relationship with Parthia in 20 BCE after he had seized power over Rome. He returned the Roman standards and war prisoners which were taken from Phraates IV of Partha in 53 BCE at the disgraceful defeat of Crassus at Carrhae. And he was given the authority to assign the Armenian king recommended by Parthia. These agreements were manipulated as a victory in Rome and widely advertised throughout the empire (*signis receptis* coins and *prima porta*; *Res Gestae* 29; Cass. Dio 54.8). The Augustan order was maintained even when he appointed Ariobarzanes as the king of Armenia. Afterwards, Roman emperors exercised the right to designate the Armenian kings, and they would find and appoint Roman-friendly candidates from Pontus, Judaea, or Iberia. Meanwhile, due to the unstable political situation, the Parthian *šāhānšāh* had to send their ambitious heirs to Rome as hostages beginning with the reign of Phrates IV (Strab. 16.1.28). It

was not until 35 CE that the Parthian *šāhānšāh* Artabanus III temporarily tried to establish his eldest son, Arsaces, as king of Armenia but was thwarted by Tiberius's opposition and countermeasures. Instead, the king's brother, Mithridates, was appointed as the king of Armenia (Tac. *Ann.* 6.31; Cass. Dio 58.26.3). Nonetheless, a prelude to war began in 51 CE when Rhadamistus, the son of the Iberian king Pharasmanes I, executed his uncle Mithridates and obtained the throne of Armenia.

The exact reason why Rhadamistus had suddenly yearned for the throne of Armenia remains unclear. Tacitus's explanation that Rhadamistus's innate aggressive tendencies were intentionally directed to Armenia by his father Parasmanes is not sufficient to support the truth (Tac. *Ann.* 12.44). Given the situation that his oldest son must have succeeded his own throne, it seems that Parasmanes had no other choice but to support his younger son's attention to the power outside his country. After being chased by Rhadamistus, Mithridates fled to the fortress of Gorneas, where Roman soldiers were garrisoned. The commander Caelius Pollio was obliged to protect the emperor-appointed king, but by accepting a bribe from Rhadamistus, he decided to remain as a spectator. The result turned out to be a parricide and the replacement of the Armenian throne. Seizing on this chaotic situation as an opportunity, Vologases I of Parthia invaded Armenia, and the fight escalated into a war between Rome and Parthia once again (Tac. *Ann.* 12.45-51). Vologases I was supported by the Armenian nobles, who at the time were tired of the rule of the Iberian royal family, and finally overthrew Rhadamistus in 54 CE and succeeded in replacing him with his brother Tiridates, crowning him as Tiridates I.

Rome's response to the Parthian provocation was firm and straightforward. Nero ordered the legions of the eastern provinces to replenish their forces and the client kingdoms of the eastern frontiers to prepare for a war (Tac. *Ann.* 13.7). Then he sent one of the best generals of his time, Corbulo, as governor and field commander (*dux belli*) of Galatia and Cappadocia (Syme 1970: 38-39). Corbulo joined with Ummidius Quadratus, governor of the province of Syria, and began preparing for the war. But surprisingly, the war did not break out for a while. In 55 CE, Tiridates suddenly repatriated the war prisoners and requested reconciliation (Tac. *Ann.* 13.37). The two sides seemingly reduced the tension and were ready for signing a peace treaty. Presumably, in the Roman camp, there must have been an atmosphere of victory without fighting. In the Sebasteion temple of Aphrodisias, a wealthy city in the province of Asia, Nero, in the shape of the war god Ares, was sculpted to take down the personified nation Armenia, along with the sculpture of Claudius who also overthrew Britannia (Smith pl. xiv; pl. xvi).

However, neither Nero nor Corbulo had any intention of ending the war in the first place. From 56 to 57 CE, Corbulo concentrated exclusively on gathering and training troops and then in 58 CE, taking advantage of the return of Vologases I to Parthia for settling domestic problems, quickly marched into Armenia to seize the city of Artaxata (Tac. *Ann.* 13.34-41; Cass. Dio 62.19.4). In 59 CE, he continued marching to the southwest and confirmed the capitulation of Tigranocerta. Throughout the war, Corbulo's side was able to receive military and logistical support from client kingdoms such as Commagene and Iberia. On the other hand, Tiridates,

who could not expect any support from Vologases, was seriously deficient against their enemies. Eventually, in 60 CE, Tiridates decided to flee, and Nero appointed the heir of the Cappadocian and Herodian dynasties, Tigranes VI, as the new king of Armenia. After achieving these brilliant military achievements, Corbulo was promoted to be the governor of Syria as the successor of Quadratus (Tac. *Ann.* 14.26).

Rome and Armenia had expected that the war was still unfinished. And, war unexpectedly broke out in 61 CE when Tigranes VI, the king of Armenia, invaded Adiabene in the south. Tiridates I, who could not miss the opportunity, attempted to drive out Tigranes with the support of Vologases, but was immediately subdued by Corbulo's prompt defensive efforts (Tac. *Ann.* 15.3-5; Cass. Dio 62.20.2-3). The stalemate continued among the Parthian forces trying to conquer Tigranocerta and the Tigranes-Roman forces who had been besieged in the city. Corbulo, governor of the province of Syria, was prepared at the border region, waiting for a command from Rome. Nero, however, dispatched more troops with Lucius Caesennius Paetus as the field commander in order to ultimately merge the Armenian kingdom as a Roman province.

> But as Corbulo could not endure a rival, so Pætus, who would have been sufficiently honoured by ranking second to him, disparaged the results of the war, and said repeatedly that there had been no bloodshed or spoil, that the sieges of cities were sieges only in name, and that he would soon impose on the conquered tribute and laws and Roman administration, instead of the empty shadow of a king.
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> *sed neque Corbulo aemuli patiens, et Paetus, cui satis ad gloriam erat, si proximus haberetur, despiciebat gesta, nihil caedis aut praedae, usurpatas nomine tenus urbium expugnationes dictitans: se tributa ac leges et pro umbra regis Romanum ius victis impositurum.* (Tac. *Ann.* 15.6).

Being aware of Corbulo's existence, it is highly unlikely that Paetus claimed Armenia as Roman province, because without the direct command of the emperor, it would have been impossible to do so. Paetus integrated the *legio IV Scythica* and *legio XII Fulminata* that were acquired from Corbulo to the *legio V Macedonica* and the rest of the auxiliary units recruited from Pontus, Galatia, and Cappadocia. According to Tacitus' explanation that the Roman army consistently operated auxiliaries that were in similar size to a legion (Tac. *Ann.* 4.5; 13.8), the estimated number of personnel would have been around 30,000. If Corbulo's *legio III Gallica, VI Ferrata, X Pretensis* and his other auxiliary troops had joined in, the number of men would have been around 1/5 of the entire imperial army (Ban 2015: 28-29, table 1). The only problem was Paetus's poor leadership as the commander of the army. 62 CE was when Paetus's army was ceased by the force of Vologases at Arsamosata, subsequently being nearly annihilated with the bloodshed in Rhandeia (Tac. *Ann.* 15.10-15; Cass. Dio 62.21.1-4).[3]

[3] A. Stepanyan and L. Minasyan argue that the defeat was as disgraceful as that by the Samnite in 321 BCE

Vologases I would not have intended an all-out war with Rome because the Parthian *šāhānšāh* chose appeasement rather than a hard-line policy, due to their winning. Instead of taking the momentum into a military expedition, he wrote a letter to Nero. The letter first emphasised his generosity against Paetus and his lost legions and then explained that Tiridates would visit Rome to receive the crown "were he not detained by the scruples attaching to his priesthood (*nisi sacerdotii religione attineretur*)". Prior his visit, he would visit Nero's standard and statue that were in the headquarters of the Roman garrison, and then would begin his enthronement with the legionaries in attendance (Tac. *Ann.* 15.24). Given a provisory clause, it is insinuated that Vologases's side had a clear advantage in the negotiations. Aware of the situation, Nero, who suffered failure due to the defeat of Paetus, was forced to carefully take his approach to the Armenian question. At the crossroads between peace and war, Nero chose an honourable war over a disgraceful peace as the result of discussions with the "*primores civitatis*":

> Then was perceived the mockery of the barbarians in petitioning for what they had wrested from us, and Nero consulted with the chief men of the State whether they should accept a dangerous war or a disgraceful peace. There was no hesitation about war. Corbulo, who had known our soldiers and the enemy for so many years, was appointed to conduct it, that there might be no more blunders through any other officer's incapacity; for people were utterly disgusted with Pætus.
>
> *tum intellecto barbarorum inrisu, qui peterent quod eripuerant, consuluit inter primores civitatis Nero, bellum anceps an pax inho[ne]sta placeret. nec dubitatum de bello. et Corbulo militum atque hostium tot per annos gnarus gerendae rei praeficitur, ne cuius alterius inscitia rursum peccaretur, quia Paeti piguerat.* (Tac. *Ann.* 15.25)

Corbulo, who was once again appointed as field commander by Nero in 63 CE, eventually acted as the resolver. He first replenished the spirits of the Roman army and reinforced his forces, transforming them into a formidable power. When Vologases I and Tiridates I sent envoys to negotiate, Corbulo sent them back with his centurions to deliver the Roman message. He first advised Tiridates to end the war before the kingdom suffers the ravages of war, and admonished Vologases to form an alliance with Rome for the safety of the Parthians before any harm is incurred to either side. Moreover, Corbulo also advised that it was possible for the Roman emperor to continue the war, while the Parthian *šāhānšāh* could not do so, so that the latter rather unite its own people (Tac. *Ann.* 15.27; Cass. Dio 62.23.1). The atmosphere for the negotiation was quite different from the previous one in Rome. Through his military action of menacing the borderlands between the Roman Empire and the kingdom of Armenia, Corbulo made it clear that his message was not just words. Finally, Vologases decided to end the war, and Tiridates signed a peace treaty at Rhandeia, his formerly victorious battlefield. Surprisingly,

(Stepanyan and Minasyan 2013: 20-22).

Corbulo was not dissatisfied with the location of the peace treaty, Rhandeia, which totally would not be weird if he did. According to Cassius Dio, now that they the two sides were in different positions, he expected that it would be an opportunity for the soldiers to take away the shame of the past that they had experienced on the battleground (Cass. Dio 62.23.2).

The Significance of the Treaty of Rhandeia

The Treaty of Rhandeia signed between Rome and Parthia in 63 CE and the following visit of Tiridates I to Rome for the implementation of the treaty was one of the most impressive diplomatic scenes in ancient history. As described earlier, Paetus was defeated at the level of battle, but in the war itself, due to Corbulo's interruption, there was neither an absolute winner nor a loser. And, presumably, as a result, this stalemate opened the window for both sides to discuss the peace treaty. One interesting fact is that from this point on, Vologases I becomes more passive in his actions. As the Romans claim, Corbulo's threat may have worked, or Parthia's internal problems may have caused trouble again. However, it is more plausible to argue that Parthia's purpose had already been achieved. Initially, the intention of Parthia was to make Armenia, located on the borderland with Rome, a pro-Parthian 'buffer state.' Eventually, no matter what the process, now that Vologases had succeeded in crowning his brother Tyridates I as the king of Armenia, the initial goal was completely achieved.

Negotiations at Rhandeia proceeded as follows (Tac. *Ann.* 15.28-29; Cass. Dio 62.23.2-4). With mounted soldiers from both sides lined up straight, Corbulo and Tiridates I descended from their horses and held hands in front of Tiridates's barrack. Corbulo highly praised Tiridates for restraining risky adventures and choosing a path that is both safe and beneficial to the kingdom. Tiridates I promised that he would place a token of allegiance in front of Nero's statue. He then further emphasised that it will surely be returned on to his hand by Nero. After discussing about the future, the two men ended the meeting with a kiss. A few days after, Tiridates visited the Roman barrack again. This time, with Roman legionaries and mounted soldiers lined up on either side, Tiridates walked to the statue of Nero and officially put his crown down. The crown that he put down was a diadem, which he had received from Vologases in 61 CE to represent his external kingship. Additionally, the other crown tiara symbolises the highest authority in Armenia and was presented at the council of Armenian nobles in 54 CE (Stepanyan and Minasyan 27). Finally, the ceremony ended with a grand banquet.

The peace treaty between Rome and Armenia reached a climax three years later in 66 CE, when Tiridates I arrived in Rome to enforce the treaty. Tiridates purposely travelled a total of nine months (Cass. Dio 63.2.1), which would have taken only one month if traveling quickly by sea and four months by land (measured in http://orbis.stanford.edu). It was a grand and extravagant procession like a triumphal ceremony, accompanied by 3,000 Parthian cavalry and equivalent Roman soldiers, costing 800,000 sestertii a day (Cass. Dio 63.1.2-2.2. cf. Plin. *HN* 30.16). If the annual income of the Roman Empire was approximately 2 billion sestertii (Scheidel and

Friesen 73-74), it can be said that about 11% of the budget was spent for the trip, added to which would also have been the cost of staying in Rome and returning to Armenia. Nero went all the way to Naples to greet Tiridates and the others, and treated him with great hospitality during his stay in Rome. It was recorded that around 200 million sestertius was spent on the gifts alone (Cass. Dio 63.6.5). The coronation of Tiridates was held in a grand way with the presence of a large crowd. Though secured to its sheath, with the sword still intact, Tiridates knelt down before Nero and took back the diadem he had previously laid down in Corbulo's barrack (Tac. *Ann.* 15.31; Suet. *Ner*. 13.2; Cass. Dio 63.2.4). Afterwards, Nero generously held a banquet and even played the lyre by his own hand.

It remains unclear why Nero had paid so much effort and money to Tiridates I's visit to Rome. However, some emperors in the past had deliberately exposed foreign ambassadors to the public, making them the victim of their own political propaganda. Augustus had placed the hostages from Parthia in the arena so that they were portrayed like exotic animals, and Claudius had also used the envoys from Parthia and Armenia for a similar purpose (Suet. *Aug.* 43.4; *Claud*. 25.4). It was highly possible that Tiridates, who visited Rome in 66 CE, was also designed to be considered, in Tacitus' words, "merely for show for peoples no less than a captive (*ostentui gentibus quanto minus quam captivum*)" (Tac. *Ann.* 15.29, 31). About 170 years later, Cassius Dio regarded Nero's 'pretentious ceremony' as "disgraceful (*αἰσχρός*)" and consistently criticised his action, while praising Corbulo's achievements on the other hand (Cass. Dio 63.1.1-7.1). As a close aide to Severus Alexander who had to support the Persian expedition in 231-233 CE, Cassius would have had no other choice but to comment in such manner.

In any case, the Treaty of Rhandeia was a remarkable achievement. Some of the children of Tiridates I and Vologases I were sent to Rome as hostages (Tac. *Ann*. 15.30; Cass. Dio 62.23.4). After returning to Armenia, Tiridates rebuilt the destroyed city of Artaxata with Nero's financial aid, renaming it Neronia (Cass. Dio 63.6.5-6, 7.2). The biggest achievement above all was the settlement of the war situation, which has lasted for about ten years from 54 to 63 CE. Peace came among Rome, Armenia, and Parthia, with the gates of the Temple of Janus firmly shut (Suet. *Ner*. 13.2; *RIC* I 263-267, 269-271, 284, 287, 289, 291, 300, 302, 304, 306-309, 323-324, 326, 337, 339, 342, 347-351, 353-354, 362, 366 (http://www.ancientcoins,ca/RIC/index.htm). The peace on the frontline, which was finally settled by the Treaty of Rhandeia, was maintained for more than 50 years. It was not until Trajan had invaded Parthia in 116 CE, forcibly binding Armenia and made it a province. Furthermore, even after Nero's death and the outbreak of civil war in Rome, Parthia hardly intervened. Although no king was actually crowned in Rome since Tiridates I, the Roman emperor still had to approve the successor of Armenian throne from the Arsacid royal family chosen by the Parthian *šāhānšāh*. In other words, the Arsacid royal family who did not gain the Roman emperor's approval was disallowed to be enthroned. This great principle of the Treaty of Rhandeia, which is that one cannot become king of Armenia without the permission

of the Roman Emperor, was upheld until the annexation of Armenia by Shapur I (Šāpur I) of Sassanid Persia in the year 252 CE.

Conclusion

In 66 BCE, as the result of the Third Mithridatic War, the Kingdom of Armenia was forcibly placed on the borderlands between the eastern frontier of Rome and the western frontier of Parthia. Therefore, Armenia later became extremely crucial geopolitically in Rome's strategy against Parthia. After the failure of Crassus' expedition to Parthia in 53 BCE, relations between the two nations were restored by Augustus in 20 BCE. The Armenian question was resolved in the form of Rome appointing the candidates for the Armenian throne recommended by Parthia, but in practice, the Roman emperor had deliberately appointed the pro-Roman members from the surroundings of the royal family of Armenia. Being unable to grasp the opportunity due to the frequent quarrels regarding the succession to the throne, Parthia attempted to gain a strategic superiority in 54 CE by abruptly placing Tiridates I of the same Arsacid dynasty on the Armenian throne. Thereafter, as Nero decided to dispatch Corbulo, the Armenian War began.

Corbulo's operation was reflecting the strategic approach of Rome. All-out war with Parthia was strategically avoided, but re-defending of the eastern provinces and regaining of Roman dominance in Armenia was accomplished. Regardless, an all-out war became inevitable as Nero, obsessed with victory, replaced his commander to Paetus and attempted to annex Armenia. The result came out as a painful failure/defeat at Rhandeia in 62 CE. The following year, Corbulo, whom Nero gave the command again after consulting with the *primores civitatis*, took control of the situation and led to the Treaty of Rhandeia with Parthia. The main contents of the treaty were to allow the Roman Emperors to approve the members of Arsacid royal family recommended by the Parthians as kings of Armenia in the future, plus the coronation of Tiridates I in Rome under Nero's supervision. In 66 CE, Nero bestowed the crown on Tiridates I on a visit to Rome, spending a tremendous amount of wealth on the pretentious ceremony.

It was not strategically the right choice for both sides to crash a war to completely annex Armenia, since it was certainly obscure of whether the revenues to be reaped from making Armenia a province would be high enough to cover the expenses of running the province, stationing an army, and constantly fighting wars. If Armenia was made into a province, the borderlands would be greatly expanded and the defence of the frontier would be increasingly challenging. The Kingdom of Armenia had greater strategic value when it remained as a 'buffer state'. The Treaty of Rhandeia was the result of the coinciding alignment of strategic interests between the two parties. Peace was maintained for nearly 50 years until Trajan's Parthian War. The great principle of the Treaty of Rhandeia, which to appoint the royal family of Arsaces as king of Armenia by Roman Emperors, was not broken until the annexation of the Kingdom of Armenia by Shapur I of Sassanid Persia in 252 CE.

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This article was published by
The East Asian Journal of Classical Studies
and is contained in Volume 1, 2022
(ISBN: 979-8-9870802-0)
and may be found at www.teajcs.com.