

## Submission I

### *The Fosterage Background*

Over the course of roughly a century, from 30 B.C.E.–66 C.E., the Arsacid kings of Parthia sent members of their own family to live at the court of the Julio-Claudian emperor. Most of the direct evidence for these figures comes from literary histories composed by inhabitants of the Roman empire, who called them “hostages” (*obsides* in Latin, *homēroi* in Greek). Modern scholars have variously affirmed or rejected that label, but the literature on the Arsacids of Rome has never escaped from the framework of Greco-Roman hostageship. In this chapter, I strike a new course and argue that, from the Parthian point of view, the Arsacids of Rome are better understood not as hostages, but as foster-children.

My argument relies on a methodological intervention that supports a different perspective on these figures: to reconstruct the Parthian vantage point, I will give precedence to sources from the ancient Near East rather than Greco-Roman literature from the Mediterranean. Scholars have traditionally investigated Arsacid motives on the basis of Roman historiography. That approach is defensible and to a degree necessary, since there are few surviving documentary or literary sources from the Parthian empire, and virtually none that bear directly upon the Arsacids of Rome. But a broader set of Near Eastern texts can support a different way of understanding the circulation of royal children between two imperial dynasties. Much of the evidence I will bring to bear was neither produced by the Arsacids nor created during their reign. All the same, these sources offer insight into the role of fosterage in Parthian culture that Greco-Roman literature cannot supply.

Attention to fosterage can show how the Arsacid understanding of “hostage submission” stood in stark contrast to the Roman one. To Parthian eyes, the Roman emperor’s custody of Arsacid dynasts could indicate his subjection to Parthia, not

his dominance over it. Anthropological studies of political fosterage distinguish between *patronal* and *cliental* arrangements; in the former, superiors raise the children of subordinates, but in the latter, it is the other way around.<sup>1</sup> An application of this heuristic to pre-Islamic Iran shows that, on balance, cliental fosterage was the dominant paradigm, and there is ample evidence that subordinates of the king of kings could raise his children. In this framework, the transfer of Arsacids from Parthia to Rome can be seen as the product of a pragmatic misunderstanding: the Arsacids could maintain that they had found a new cliental fosterer, while the Romans could insist that they had obtained high-status hostages. Because of their divergent cultural interpretations of these exchanges, both sides could walk away convinced of their supremacy over the other.

Moreover, the reinterpretation of the Arsacids of Rome as foster-children supports a new conceptualization of Roman-Parthian relations centered on interdynastic kinship instead of interstate rivalry. Studies of foreign affairs between Rome and Parthia tend to privilege the interactions that modern observers associate with foreign politics, especially war, diplomacy, and treaty making. The categorization of the Arsacids of Rome as hostages has subsumed their histories under this heading. Since the Romans associated hostageship with the conclusion of treaties, most discussions connect the Arsacids to formal agreements between the Roman and Parthian empires or, more generally, to the feuds over territory that led to military and diplomatic engagements. On these readings, Rome's Arsacid inhabitants were human collateral for agreements between states or tools for managing the balance of power between the imperial giants of the ancient Mediterranean and Near East.

A shift of focus from hostageship to fosterage offers a corrective. It puts not the state but the dynasty at the center of analysis, and it shows how ruling families transcended, and were not coterminous with, the political borders of the empires they ruled. War and diplomacy mattered to Roman-Parthian relations, to be sure. Just as important, however, was the formation of an interdynastic family linked by the bonds of kinship—bonds that were forged by the Julio-Claudian emperor's fosterage of Arsacid royalty. Instead of the structural pressures of a clash between two great powers, fosterage highlights how the Parthians constructed and understood their relationship with Rome, and how kinship was a central feature of this construction.

#### ARSACID "HOSTAGESHIP"

The general outlook of the Roman sources is clear: the Arsacids of Rome were hostages. Only one author, Tacitus, draws on the vocabulary of fosterage to describe them, and even he uses the designation of "hostage" more often.<sup>2</sup> The term is applied to the earliest Arsacid to take up residence in Rome in c. 30 B.C.E., and

1. For literature, see below, nn.56–58.

2. For a discussion of fosterage language in Tacitus, see chapter 3.

TABLE 1 Arsacids Sent from Parthia to Rome

Name(s)	Date	Sources
Son of Frahād IV	c. 30 B.C.E.	Cass. Dio 51.18.2–3, 53.33.1–2; Just. 42.5.6–9; cf. <i>Mon. Anc.</i> 32.1
Vonones, Frahād, Seraspadanes, Rhodaspes, two wives, four sons	19–9 B.C.E.	<i>Mon. Anc.</i> 32.2; Vell. Pat. 2.94.4; Strab. 6.4.2, 16.1.28; Joseph. <i>AJ</i> 18.42; Tac. <i>Ann.</i> 2.1.2; Suet. <i>Aug.</i> 21.3; Just. 42.5.11–12; Fest. <i>Brev.</i> 19.4; [Aurel. Vict.] <i>Epit.</i> 1.8; Oros. 6.21.29; Eutrop. <i>Brev.</i> 7.9; <i>CIL</i> 6.1799; cf. Ausonius <i>Epist.</i> 23.6; Suda s.v. <i>epagelei</i>
Dārāw; other Arsacids	c. 36/7 C.E.	Joseph. <i>AJ</i> 18.96, 101–5; Suet. <i>Calig.</i> 14.3; <i>Vit.</i> 2.4; Cass. Dio 59.27.2–3
Several Arsacids	55 C.E.	Tac. <i>Ann.</i> 13.9.1
Daughter of Tirdād; other Arsacids	63 C.E.	Tac. <i>Ann.</i> 15.30.2; Cass. Dio 62.23.4
Several Arsacids*	66 C.E.	Cass. Dio 63.1.2; cf. Plin <i>HN</i> 6.23; Joseph. <i>BJ</i> 2.379
Daughter of Husraw; other Arsacids*	c. 114 C.E.	SHA <i>Had.</i> 13.8; Aurel. Vict. <i>Lib. Caes.</i> 13.3
Zalaces*	c. 117 C.E.	Juv. 2.164

to the participants of the last major transfer in c. 66 C.E.<sup>3</sup> It is also used consistently by Roman authors across a range of periods, from the early empire through late antiquity. The testimonies, predominantly literary, are collected here (table 1). Cases of uncertain historicity are indicated with an asterisk. The main exchanges of the Julio-Claudian period are clear enough, but the evidence for the continuation of the practice after the reign of Nero is thin.

For most of these authors, the residence of Arsacid royalty at the Julio-Claudian court was a sign that Rome had subordinated the Parthian kingdom to its imperial order, because hostage submission was an obligation imposed upon subjugated peoples. The long history of hostageship as a corollary of republican imperial expansion had taught them as much, and the expectation persisted under the principate. As many scholars stress, the English word “hostage” is in one respect a misleading translation of Latin *obses* and Greek *homēros*. English speakers expect a hostage to suffer bodily harm if the hostage’s surrenderers fail to comply with the captors, but out of dozens of Roman cases, only a few fulfill this expectation, and even these are of doubtful historicity.<sup>4</sup> However, English speakers also imagine hostage takers to be in a position of strength over hostage givers, and that connotation suits Roman hostageship well. When for instance the early imperial author Velleius Paterculus writes that “the king of the Parthians even sent his sons

3. The precise date of the transfer of Vonones and his brothers is debated. See Dąbrowa 1987: 64; Wheeler 2002: 289 n.5; and esp. Rose 2005: 36–37.

4. Cases of Republican hostage taking are tabulated in Walker 1980: 214–59. On the connection between conquest and hostageship, see esp. Allen 2006: 95–125, and 52–57 for rare bodily punishment. The shortcomings of “hostage” as a translation are stressed by Braund 1984: 12–13; Campbell 1993: 224 n.2; Jussen 2022: 148.

as hostages to [Augustus] Caesar in fear of the reputation of such a great name,” he reflects a widespread attitude that the acquisition of hostages from foreign lands showed the emperor’s power and the enemy’s weakness.<sup>5</sup> The act conferred even greater prestige if the hostages were royalty, and in the early principate there was no greater game to bag than the Arsacids, the rulers of the only remaining empire whose power rivaled Rome’s own.

Even the authors who questioned the jingoistic interpretations of their peers did so within the framework of hostageship. Strabo’s explanation of one Arsacid king’s motives in sending his family members to Rome highlights factors within Parthian politics. The king feared that domestic opponents might find a more compliant monarch in one of his sons, Strabo says, so he sent some of his children to Rome to ensure that they could not be used to dethrone him.<sup>6</sup> Yet Strabo still calls these children hostages, and despite his discussion of internal motives, he elsewhere describes the transfer as a sign that the Parthians were “very close to surrendering all their authority to the Romans.”<sup>7</sup> The same holds for the testimony of Tacitus, who suggests that a later king sent Arsacids to Nero “to remove those suspected of rivalry through a nominal hostage submission.”<sup>8</sup> That final phrase styles the exchange as a hostage transfer in appearance only; in reality, it was a purge of opponents. Yet Tacitus routinely applies the designation of hostage to Rome’s Arsacid residents. Even if he saw ulterior motives at play that had nothing to do with Roman preeminence, hostageship remained central to his narratives.

Scholarly studies of the Arsacids of Rome have inherited these limitations from the Greco-Roman authors on whose testimony they exclusively rely. Some historians echo ancient Roman views of Parthian hostage submission as a concession to Julio-Claudian supremacy. After a nuanced discussion of the motives of Frahād IV, Elisabeth Nedergaard concludes that “it is difficult to believe that he would have wanted to hand over the legitimate heirs to the Parthian throne to Augustus of his own free will.”<sup>9</sup> For the events of 37 and 55 C.E., A. D. Lee finds that the reigning king gave hostages “either in response to Roman demands or in circumstances which clearly indicated his acknowledgment of Roman ascendancy.”<sup>10</sup> Irene Huber and Udo Hartmann likewise see Tirdād’s submission of his daughter as a hostage (63 C.E.) as an act of deference to Roman superiority, since in their view Rome did not reciprocate.<sup>11</sup> These assessments accord well with more general studies

5. Vell. Pat. 2.94.4. The fear inspired by a ruler’s name is a common motif in Latin literature: see Maguinness 1932: 56; Woodman 1977: 102, with references.

6. Strab. 16.1.28; cf. Joseph. *AJ* 18.42–44.

7. Strab. 6.4.2.

8. Tac. *Ann.* 13.9.1; cf. *Ann.* 2.1.2. On the phrase, see further Thijs 2019: 10 n.30.

9. Nedergaard 1988: 111.

10. Lee 1991: 367.

11. Huber and Hartmann 2006: 505. But cf. Tac. *Ann.* 15.28.3, where two high-ranking Romans (including Corbulo’s son-in-law) enter Tirdād’s camp as a “pledge” (*pignus*).

of Roman-Parthian relations that highlight Roman belligerence, aggression, and expansionism in the face of Parthian weakness.<sup>12</sup>

Other scholars have rehabilitated Parthia and made space for explanations rooted in Arsacid agency, but without moving beyond the concept of hostageship. Edward Dąbrowa, Emma Strugnell, Josef Wiesehöfer, Marek Olbrycht, and Juan Antonio Álvarez-Pedrosa interpret Frahād IV's use of hostage submission as a way to manage Parthian dynastic rivalries—always a concern in the large, polygamous ruling families of the ancient Near East.<sup>13</sup> Karl-Heinz Ziegler also foregrounds this dynamic while insisting that the king's submission of his children would not have diminished his sovereignty or rank.<sup>14</sup> A similar reading is favored by Jason Schlude, who takes the transaction as a sign that “Phraates [= Frahād] trusted Augustus” and did not dispatch his children under compulsion.<sup>15</sup> Erich Gruen holds that the arrival of Frahād's children in Rome “did not signify deference or subordination, as sometimes portrayed; rather, it provided a means whereby the Parthian king could defuse opposition at home and stabilize his hold on the throne.”<sup>16</sup> But while such treatments offer a valuable corrective to a long tradition of Eurocentric scholarship on Parthia, their conclusions still rest on Roman literary evidence, and they are accordingly circumscribed by Roman social categories. These scholars push back against the hegemonic narratives of Roman history, but they still allow Greco-Roman historiography to set the terms of a discussion that revolves around hostageship.

An approach that privileges non-Roman evidence and the institution of political fosterage can advance the debate beyond its customary poles of Roman superiority or Parthian resistance. No scholarly discussion of the Arsacids of Rome has used Near Eastern sources to recover the Parthian vantage point. The landmark study of pre-Islamic Iranian fosterage remains that of Geo Widengren, whose pioneering discussion greatly informs the following pages. The Arsacids of the first century C.E. do not appear in his treatment of the topic, however.<sup>17</sup> Meret Strothmann and Everett Wheeler have alluded in footnotes to Widengren's work in their discussions of the Arsacids of Rome, but they did not use the evidence he employed to reconstruct matters on the Parthian side.<sup>18</sup> I rectify this gap in

12. Isaac 1992: 28–33; Cornell 1993: 143.

13. Dąbrowa 1987: 64–65; Strugnell 2008: 283; Wiesehöfer 2010: 187, following the explanation in Joseph. *AJ* 18.41–42; Olbrycht 2018: 391; Álvarez-Pedrosa 2022: 109–10. See also Cameron 2019: 313; Thijs 2019: 52 and n.294. On royal polygamy in the ancient Near East, see further below, and chapter 2.

14. Ziegler 1964: 52.

15. Schlude 2020: 100.

16. Gruen 1996: 160, citing Braund 1984: 12–13. Cf. Gregoratti 2015: 732, where Vonones et al. are “not hostages in the true sense, but guest princes who had voluntarily come to Rome on their own initiative.”

17. Widengren 1969: 64–95; cf. Widengren 1976: 251–52, 268–69.

18. Strothmann 2012: 91 n.36; Wheeler 2016: 193 n.157.

the literature here. In the absence of a robust corpus of first-century texts from Parthia itself, recourse will be made to histories that both pre- and postdate the Arsacid empire—a method that is not, in an absolute sense, *better* than a reliance on Greco-Roman historiography, since some of the sources I will consider are far removed in time from the Parthian period. But the Near Eastern evidence supports a new perspective on these figures that is irrecoverable from Greco-Roman authors. The story that emerges is not about hostages caught between empires, but rather the interconnection of dynasties through pro-parentage and kinship.

### THE NEAR EASTERN BACKGROUND

Interdynastic kinship was foundational to interstate relations in the ancient Near East. From the earliest attestations of the Bronze Age to the final days of the Sasanian empire, the connections among ruling families were a key factor in how foreign relations were conceptualized, formulated, and conducted. These kinships could take several forms, including brotherhood, intermarriage, and fosterage. While the mechanisms varied in prevalence across historical periods and regions, the articulation of politics in the idiom of family relations was more than a rhetorical device; it structured and controlled the realm of ancient Near Eastern interstate affairs.

Expressions of interdynastic brotherhood appear at the very beginning of the epistolary record among the rulers and administrators of different Near Eastern polities. Early testimony survives in a clay tablet from the archives of Ebla, a kingdom in present-day Syria.<sup>19</sup> Dating to c. 2350 B.C.E., the cuneiform tablet bears the Elbaite text of a letter from one Ibubu, steward of the Eblan king Yirkab-Damu, to an unnamed messenger in the service of Zizi, king of the north Iranian polity of Hamazi. The document preserves two invocations of brotherhood. First, a request from Ibubu to the messenger is bracketed with the sentence “you are (my) brother and I am (your) brother.” The repetition of the claim places a strong emphasis on fraternal connection. Second, the passage closes by affirming the relationship not of the correspondents, but of the rulers they serve: “Yirkab-Damu, the king of Ebla is the brother of Zizi, the king of Hamazi; Zizi, the king of Hamazi, is the brother of Yirkab-Damu, king of Ebla.”<sup>20</sup> The reverse of the tablet confirms that the letter was in fact sent, or at least given to Zizi’s messenger.

The letter reflects an ancient Near Eastern tendency to map the structures of the family onto larger units of social and political organization. At the highest level, the entire state could be viewed as an extended household over which the king presided in the capacity of father.<sup>21</sup> When kings of more or less peer status

19. Podany 2010: 22; see also Archi 2015: 77–120; Ristvet 2017: 44–47.

20. Translations from Michalowski 1993: 13–14 (no. 2); see also Bonechi 2016 for a recent study of the letter.

21. Liverani 2000: 18; Westbrook 2003: 83; Podany 2010: 29; Giorgieri and Mora 2010: 147.

communicated with one another, the language of brotherhood offered a way to both articulate equality and establish a foundation for reciprocal claims. A key sentence in Ibubu's letter references kinship as a basis for the mutual fulfillment of wishes: "[this is] what is (appropriate) to brother(s): whatever desire you express, I shall grant and you, (whatever) desire (I express), shall grant."<sup>22</sup> On this logic, the behavior of kings toward one another was to be modeled on fraternal relations. Such kinship had no biological basis, but it was no less concrete or meaningful for that reason.

The tradition of interdynastic brotherhood that began under the Ebla system would long outlast it. For the early second millennium B.C.E., evidence for brotherhood survives in various Mesopotamian letters, some of which attest the extension of kinship language to the kings of Elam on the Iranian plateau.<sup>23</sup> It was not until the fourteenth century B.C.E., however, that the phenomenon reached its high-water mark. The efflorescence is captured in the Amarna letters, a cache of around four hundred documents mostly in Akkadian found at Tell el-Amarna in Egypt.<sup>24</sup> Around thirty-six of these letters preserve correspondence among the great kings of the Hittite, Egyptian, Mittani, and Assyrian kingdoms, among others.<sup>25</sup> In the Amarna system, the standard salutation in letters between rulers is "brother" (Akkadian *ahum*). The relation was transferrable: if a king died and was replaced by his son, foreign counterparts could hail the new king as "brother" just as they had the old.<sup>26</sup> This kinship appellation was no mere metaphor or diplomatic nicety. As Raymond Cohen puts it, "when Great Kings called each other 'brother,' appealed to past and present family ties, and negotiated dynastic marriages, this was literally the way they understood the working of the international system."<sup>27</sup> The kings belonged to an interdynastic kin group that transcended their respective polities, and membership in this group shaped the interactions among them.

22. Translation: Michalowski 1993: 14.

23. Examples: first, in 2425 B.C.E., an inscription from the Mesopotamian city of Lagash records that "Enmetena, ruler of Lagash, and Lugalkiginedudu, ruler of Uruk, established brotherhood"; translation from Cooper 1986: 58. For the Sumerian text see also Barton 1931; Frayne 2008: 200–202; for discussion, see Cooper 2003: 244; Podany 2010: 33. Second, for "brother" in eighteenth century B.C.E. correspondence between Mesopotamian kings and Elam, see Charpin and Durand 1991: 64; Potts 1999: 169. Third, for brotherhood in the letters from Tell Shamshāra, see Eidem and Læssøe 2001: 140–41 (no. 67).

24. On the site, see Stevens 2016.

25. Number of documents preserving correspondence among the Great Kings: Mayes 2016: 152. Assyria was a new arrival on the interstate scene in the fourteenth century; see EA 15 = Moran 1992: 37–38. Mycenaean Greece may have been included in this system as well, though the evidence is not clear: see Cline 1995: 146; Cline 2014: 43–53.

26. See e.g. EA 29, in which the Mitannian king Tushratta refers to both the (recently deceased) Egyptian pharaoh Amenhotep and Amenhotep's son Akhenaten as "brother."

27. Cohen 1996: 21; cf. Liverani 2001: 135–38; Podany 2010: 28–36.

Brotherhood coexisted with and complemented another method of forging kinship bonds that was in equally frequent use throughout the Bronze Age: interdynastic marriage. Early evidence for such unions survives in the Ebla archives, where scribes recorded the dowries that accompanied princesses on their journeys to foreign courts.<sup>28</sup> Eblaite royal women married the kings of neighboring cities and those of more distant powers like Tell Brak and Kiš.<sup>29</sup> Further examples are evident throughout Mesopotamia and its neighboring regions: at Ur, Akkad, Babylon, Mari, and Elam, among others.<sup>30</sup> By the time of the late Bronze Age, the Amarna letters along with other documentary evidence reveal a dense network of marital connections among the ruling families of the eastern Mediterranean.<sup>31</sup>

Intermarriage outlived brotherhood after the late Bronze Age collapse, though its prevalence was somewhat diminished in an interstate environment that was less interconnected than the Amarna period. Neo-Assyrian kings in the first millennium B.C.E. would sometimes marry their daughters to foreign rulers, and onomastics may suggest that they took foreign wives as well. The evidence, however, is less extensive than it is for the late Bronze Age.<sup>32</sup> Achaemenid kings, for their part, intermarried with the Persian nobility, and perhaps with foreigners as well.<sup>33</sup> Intermarriage also played a role in Achaemenid relations with the polities on the empire's western frontier. Herodotus discusses two cases of Persian intermarriage with the Argead monarchy of Macedon and the Philaidae of Athens, though no Achaemenid royalty were involved.<sup>34</sup> Perhaps the best-known case is that of Pausanias, an Agiad of Sparta, though his alleged efforts to marry an Achaemenid princess may have been slander cooked up by his Greek detractors.<sup>35</sup> Finally, marriage was a key mode of interaction among the dynasties of the Hellenistic period, when royal women circulated among the Seleucid, Ptolemaic, and Antigonid courts.<sup>36</sup> If the political consequences of these interdynastic unions were far from

28. Biga 2003: 349; Ristvet 2017: 45.

29. Catagnoti 2003: 232–33; Archi 2015: 257–58, 437. On the marriage of the Eblaite princess Kešdut with a prince of Kiš, see further Archi and Biga 2003: 26–29; Podany 2010: 34–35.

30. Ur: Potts 1999: 136–39; Sallaberger and Westenholz 1999: 159–61. Akkad: Potts 1999: 108; Buccellati and Kelly-Buccellati 2002: 13–18. Babylon: Van De Mieroop 2005: 49; Richardson 2010: 63; Jakob 2017: 118. Mari: Lafont 1987; Lafont 2001: 313–14; Sasson 1973. Elam: van Dijk 1986; Roaf 2017: 182–95.

31. Röllig 1974: 17; Melville 2005: 225; Cline and Cline 2015: 20; Miller 2017: 98–100. See also Schulman 1979, with a focus on New Kingdom Egypt.

32. On Assyrian royal marriage, see Melville 2004; Radner 2013; for other levels of Assyrian society, see Fales 2017: 412–14; Michel 2017: 84–87.

33. Brosius 1996: 35–82; see also Hyland 2018; Brosius 2021: 150–51; Potts 2023: 56–64.

34. See Hdt. 5.21.2, 6.41, 8.136.1; Just. 7.3.9 with Müller 2021: 299.

35. Hdt. 5.32; Thuc. 1.128.7; Diod. Sic. 11.44.2–4; Just. 2.15.14; variously assessed in Wolski 1954; Lippold 1965; Fornara 1966; Lang 1967; Vogt 1969; Blamire 1970; Westlake 1977; Andrewes 1978: 92–93; Hornblower 1991: 214.

36. The evidence is collected in Seibert 1967: 129–34; see also Cohen 1974. For dedicated treatments of individual Hellenistic courts, see D'Agostini 2021; Strootman 2021: 337–40.



straightforward, the system within which they took place was clear: marriage forged bonds of kinship across the Hellenistic world's political boundaries.<sup>37</sup> Even when Hellenistic kings clashed, as they often did, the dense interconnections among their dynasties meant that these conflicts were feuds within a family, not just wars between distinct empires.

#### WHY MARRIAGE FAILED

When Roman-Parthian interaction began in the first century B.C.E., then, the ancient Mediterranean and Near East had seen over two millennia of ruling families creating kinship through brotherhood and interdynastic marriage. Yet the Julio-Claudians and the Arsacids did not intermarry, and their rulers did not call one another “brother.” Why not? The eclipse of brotherhood and intermarriage requires an explanation, as does the rise of fosterage as the mechanism that took their place.

Intermarriage failed as a mode of Arsacid-Caesarian engagement because Roman marital customs were, by ancient dynastic standards, anomalous. This was the case in two respects. First, the Julio-Claudian emperors practiced monogamy, as did the Greek and Roman populations they ruled. In this they differed from the royalty of nearly every other premodern imperial power, not only in the Near East, but in China, India, Southeast Asia, and pre-Columbian America as well.<sup>38</sup> Monogamy did not mean that emperors were limited to sexual relations with a single partner. Prostitution, slavery, and other extramarital avenues offered Roman men (especially the wealthy and powerful) various ways to practice what Walter Scheidel calls “polygynous monogamy.”<sup>39</sup> No more than one marriage was legal or socially sanctioned, however, and this norm limited the scope of possible interdynastic connections.

The second anomalous feature of Roman elite marital politics was their narrowness and insularity, a cultural proclivity that further discouraged intermarriage as a mode of interaction with foreign powers. Like many ancient societies, the Romans could use marriage alliances as a way to play the game of power politics. But this game was played only among a relatively small (if slowly expanding) group of Roman and Italian families with strong endogamous tendencies, and foreigners were not allowed a seat at the table.<sup>40</sup> In the republic and early principate, highborn Roman men did not bring foreign wives into their households in

37. On the political consequences of interdynastic marriage in the Hellenistic period, see Ogden 1999; Carney 2000: 18–23; Miron 2000; Ma 2013: 129; Strootman 2014: 107–10. Ager 2017 discusses the symbolism of royal weddings. Macurdy 1932 remains foundational on Hellenistic queenship.

38. Scheidel 2009a: 283; Scheidel 2011: 108–9; Duindam 2016: 108–27.

39. Scheidel 2011: 109.

40. Wiseman 1971: 53–64; Hopkins and Burton in Hopkins 1983: 48–49, 86–89; Dixon 1985; Severy 2003: 63. Not every marriage need have been political, however, and for many attested marriages there is no evident political motive: see Shackleton Bailey 1960: 267.

the city, and highborn women did not go abroad to become the wives of eastern kings. As a rule, Roman law and custom restricted marriages between citizens and noncitizens.<sup>41</sup> The prohibition was not always the reality for members of the lower classes, to be sure, and it eroded even for elites in later antiquity, when numerous Romano-“barbarian” marriages were contracted at the highest levels of power.<sup>42</sup> But in the age of Augustus—a ruler whose marriage legislation mandated purity, chastity, and resistance to foreign encroachment, especially for members of the senatorial order—elite Roman men and women could marry only each other.<sup>43</sup>

Responsibility for the failure of intermarriage should thus be imputed to the Roman side, because Parthian sources suggest that the Arsacids were no less open to the practice than their Hellenistic and Near Eastern predecessors. Internal documentary evidence and Greco-Roman historiography amply attest Arsacid polygamy and intermarriage with foreign dynasties. Key internal references come from the Avroman documents, which name the king and his wives by way of a dating formula in their opening lines. One of the three wives mentioned in Avroman 1 is Aryazate, “daughter of the great king Tigranes”—almost certainly Tigran II (r. 95–55 B.C.E.), the Artaxiad king of Armenia—while “Cleopatra,” one of the four wives mentioned in Avroman 2, may have been a Hellenistic princess.<sup>44</sup> A Commagenian wife of Urūd II is also attested.<sup>45</sup> Greco-Roman literary sources record further Arsacid marriage connections with the Seleucids, Armenia, Media, and the Parthian nobility.<sup>46</sup> The Roman imagination could run wild when it came to Parthian sexual customs, but there is no reason to doubt Roman reports of Arsacid polygamy, next-of-kin unions, and dynastic intermarriage, all of which are sufficiently confirmed by internal sources.<sup>47</sup> Going abroad to marry was, after all, business as usual in ancient Near Eastern interstate politics.

41. The legal sources are collected in Grubbs 2002: 154–56. For discussion, see Cherry 1990; Rose-laar 2014.

42. On Roman elite intermarriage with those considered barbarians (mostly Germans, but some Iranians as well), see the cases collected in Soraci 1974: 183–205; Blockley 1984: 66–71; Mathisen 2009: 145–48, discussing the law against Romano-barbarian intermarriage in *Cod. Theod.* 3.14.1.

43. See esp. the speech of Augustus in Cass. Dio 56.7.5. For the effects of the Augustan marriage legislation on the upper classes, see Frank 1975; McGinn 2002; Wallace-Hadrill 2014.

44. Aryazate: Avroman 1, version A, lines 3–4 = Minns 1915: 28; Hackl et al. 2010: 2.467–72. Cleopatra: Avroman 2, version A, line 2 = Minns 1915: 30; Hackl et al. 2010: 2.472–76 with Madreiter and Hartmann 2021: 236–38.

45. *SEG* 33.1215; cf. Cass. Dio 49.23.4; discussion in Brijder 2014: 60–62.

46. The relevant passages are collected and discussed in Huber and Hartmann 2006: 499–505; see also Kaim 2016: 92; Dąbrowa 2018.

47. For Roman views of Parthian sexuality, see Lerouge 2007: 339–49. On next-of-kin marriage (*xwēdōdah*) in pre-Islamic Iran, see Scheidel 1996: 324–27; de Jong 1997: 424–32; Skjærvø 2013; Vevaina 2018; Potts 2023: 64–71. Condemnations of the practice in Indian Buddhist texts parallel Roman disapproval; see Silk 2008.

It was Roman rather than Parthian customs, then, that obstructed intermarriage between elites of the two empires. For Irene Huber and Udo Hartmann, the refusal of Ardawān IV to wed his daughter to Caracalla points to a Parthian distaste for Roman spouses, but the historicity of the entire episode has been contested.<sup>48</sup> The story was richly elaborated by Herodian, who has Ardawān intone that “marriage with a barbarian is not suitable for a Roman.”<sup>49</sup> This is a Roman sentiment expressed through the mouthpiece of a foreign king, an admonition against intermarriage characteristic of Roman customs, not Parthian ones. The final word on the matter should rest with Lucan’s *Lentulus*, who, imagining Pompey’s wife Cornelia in the power of the Arsacid king, exclaims in horror, “the offspring of Metellus, a woman so illustrious, will stand by a barbarian’s bed, one among a thousand wives!”<sup>50</sup> The prejudice, disgust, and fear behind his words explain, as well as any piece of evidence, why marriages among highborn Romans and Parthians never caught on.

### FOSTERAGE

With the failure of intermarriage to effect robust and meaningful kinship bonds between the ruling dynasties of Parthia and Rome, another mechanism came to the fore: fosterage, defined here as the rearing of a child by nonnatal parents. Like intermarriage, this institution had a long history in the ancient Mediterranean and Near East, though its role in interstate politics was less visible until the Hellenistic period.

Fosterage was long marginalized in anthropological and historical studies of kinship, but work in recent decades has clarified its ability to forge kinship in past and present cultures across the globe. Early theorists of kinship privileged biological connections and assumed the primacy of ties derived from sexual procreation.<sup>51</sup> In this framework, kinships unrelated to birth or marriage were dubbed “fictive” and relegated to second-order status beneath natal affiliations.<sup>52</sup> But subsequent scholarship has shown that these ideas about kinship reflected Euro-American preoccupations rather than universal truths, and the shortcomings of such biocentrism for the study of other world cultures have received extensive discussion since the 1960s.<sup>53</sup> The decentering of biology has increased interest in fosterage (along with adoption, a related and overlapping practice) as a mode

48. Huber and Hartmann 2006: 504; cf. Madreiter and Hartmann 2021: 240. Skeptical of the episode are Timpe 1967; Zimmermann 1999: 210.

49. Herodian 4.10.5.

50. Luc. 8.410–11.

51. See David Schneider’s critique (1984: esp. 53–56) of the focus on biology in, e.g., Fortes 1949; Radcliffe-Brown 1952; Lévi-Strauss 1969.

52. See Howell 2009: 154–55, with references.

53. Key discussions include Needham 1971; Schneider 1984; Strathern 1992; Carsten 2000. For antiquity, see Potts 2023: 2–11. Useful overviews of the bibliography are offered by Wilhite 2007: 76–80; Johnson and Paul 2016: 75–83.

of kinship creation.<sup>54</sup> No longer regarded as a second-rate adjunct to biological parent-child relations, fosterage's vital role as a kinship mechanism has been identified and traced across a range of historical and contemporary cultures.<sup>55</sup>

Anthropological studies of fosterage among political elites distinguish between cliental and patronal varieties, a useful conceptual framework for thinking through the valences of the practice in the context of Roman-Parthian relations.<sup>56</sup> In a patronal fosterage arrangement, a child's biological parents send their son or daughter to a political *superior* to be raised; in cliental fosterage, the child goes to a political *subordinate*.<sup>57</sup> Historians have identified examples of both types in pre- and early modern cultures.<sup>58</sup> The patronal/cliental heuristic has limitations, of course, especially if it is conceived as a rigid binary. The fostered and fostering parties may be equals in power, for instance, or the two paradigms may be in simultaneous operation.<sup>59</sup> More importantly, however, the scheme assumes that the distribution of power is straightforward, agreed upon, and legible to both the fosterers and the fostered: clients understand and affirm their own clientage and the superiority of their patron, and vice versa. But political groups can disagree about matters of hierarchy and status, especially when they belong to different polities or societies and act on different cultural assumptions. Moreover, the scholarly categorization of a fosterage arrangement as patronal or cliental assumes the scholar's ability to correctly assess the underlying power dynamics—a simple proposition in some cases, perhaps, but not in others.

With these considerations in mind, the following discussion of the evidence for ancient Near Eastern fosterage practices will advance two ideas about the case of the Arsacids of Rome: first, that cliental fosterage is likely to have been the dominant paradigm on the Parthian side; and second, that this frame of reference produced a pragmatic misunderstanding with Rome about what it meant for Arsacid

54. On the relationship between fosterage and adoption, see Leinaweaver 2018.

55. For contemporary cultures, see Goody 1969; Goody 1982; Weismantel 1995; Carsten 2004: 137–46; Leinaweaver 2008; Howell 2009; Leinaweaver 2014. For past cultures, see Bühler 1964; Parkes 2003; Parkes 2004a; Parkes 2004b; Parkes 2006: 359–61. See further below.

56. Esther Goody distinguishes between *kinship fosterage*, where a child is raised by relatives or close kin, and *alliance fosterage*, where “a patron-client bond expressed in terms of quasi-kinship . . . [is] used to establish reciprocal claims on loyalty and support”: Goody 1982: 114; cf. Lallemand 1988: 31. The latter applies especially to families among a society's political elite.

57. Parkes 2003: 743. Parkes prefers the term *allegiance fosterage* to *alliance fosterage*; cf. Parkes 2004a: 588.

58. For cliental fosterage arrangements, see Anderson 2004; Charles-Edwards 2013: 298 on medieval Wales; Conlan 2005: 160–61 on tenth–fourteenth century C.E. Japan; Cathcart 2006: 80–85 on late medieval/early modern Scotland; Hansen 2008: 44 on early Icelandic society. For patronal fosterage arrangements, see Adams 2008: 104 on late medieval/early modern France; Thornbury 2014: 144–47 on Anglo-Saxon England. Preston-Matto 2011; Preston-Matto 2018 describes both patronal and cliental arrangements in medieval Ireland; cf. Booker 2018: 170–77; O'Donnell 2020: 100.

59. See Parkes 2003: 764 on “reciprocal” fosterage arrangements.

children to circulate. Patronal fosterage arrangements did exist in the ancient Near East, but cliental fosterage is better represented in the sources most relevant to the Arsacid case, namely contemporaneous inscriptions from Arsacid territories, Sasanian texts, late antique historiography from Arsacid Armenia, and postconquest literature in Middle and New Persian. Yet the cliental nature of Parthian fosterage is significant not because it allows the modern analyst to pass new judgment on the structure of Roman-Parthian power relations, but because it shows how both sides could draw on different cultural frameworks to construe interstate politics in a way that flattered their own position. The equation of fosterers with inferiors would have given the Arsacids a basis for claiming, maintaining, and believing that the Roman emperor had become a Parthian dependent—a notion just as viable in Parthia's culture as Arsacid "hostageship" was in Rome's. What the fosterage paradigm uncovers, then, is a Parthian view of Arsacid supremacy, underpinned by interdynastic kinship, that could coexist, in convenient incomprehension, with the opposite idea on the Roman side.

The earliest ancient Near Eastern evidence for fosterage supports the patronal model. In New Kingdom Egypt (c. 1600–1070 B.C.E.), the pharaoh's court hosted many young princes from lands like Syria-Palestine, Nubia, and Libya that were subject to his rule, if to varying degrees. The children "would be raised from childhood in the Egyptian palace, exposed to Egyptian culture, religion, and loyalty to the pharaoh," an upbringing meant to mold them into reliable clients.<sup>60</sup> Nor were their parents always opposed to the practice, which helped them ensure access to the pharaoh and maintain the stability of their local rule.<sup>61</sup> Scholars generally take the view that the institution benefited the Egyptian state, though in some cases a repatriated prince might be rejected by a local population.<sup>62</sup> Egyptian sources sometimes call these young elites "children of the nursery," a designation that used the language of paternalism to describe the pharaoh's relationship to them and to the lands they would rule.<sup>63</sup> The pharaoh was the overseer and sometimes the captor of his young wards, but in another sense he was a father figure as well.

The patronal model is also well supported by the evidence from the Neo-Assyrian empire (c. 911–609 B.C.E.), where young foreign royalty were integrated into the king's household and familial structures by various means. One was hostageship. It was common practice for the Assyrians to take as hostages the sons and daughters of local kings whom they had recently conquered or reconquered in the wake of a rebellion.<sup>64</sup> Unlike mere prisoners of war, these dynasts were treated

60. Quotation from Darnell and Manassa 2007: 145; cf. Ahlström 1993: 232; Van De Mieroop 2007: 117–19.

61. Morkot 2013: 946.

62. Wilson 1956: 183; Darnell and Manassa 2007: 109–10, 145.

63. Darnell and Manassa 2007: 109–10; Van De Mieroop 2007: 117–19.

64. See the survey of inscriptional evidence in Zawadski 1995.

with honor and enjoyed personal contact with the king.<sup>65</sup> Karen Radner has argued that the maintenance of these hostages at court aimed at “pro-Assyrian indoctrination”—that is, at the cultivation of royal clients who, once released, would serve as reliable agents of the Assyrian empire at the local level.<sup>66</sup>

But some texts preserve mention of foreign fosterlings who were not described with the Akkadian word for hostage (*līṭu*).<sup>67</sup> A letter of Esarhaddon (r. 681–669 B.C.E.) to the Elamite king Urtaku is especially important, since it reveals a mode of dynastic engagement between Assyria and the major power on the Iranian plateau at this time. The extant portion of the tablet offers greetings “to Urtaku, king of Elam, [my] br[other]. I a[m] well, your sons and daughters are well, my country and magnates are well. May Urtaku, king of Elam, my brother, be well, may my sons and daughters be well, may your magnates and your country be well!”<sup>68</sup> The exchange of children had established brotherhood between the two kings, as well as a relationship between their states that was “surprisingly cordial,” at least till the end of Esarhaddon’s reign.<sup>69</sup> Other references stress the king’s role as child rearer. Sennacherib (r. 705–681 B.C.E.) boasted of his installation of Bēl-ibni, “a scion of Šuanna (Babylon), who had grown up like a young puppy in my palace,” as one of his inscriptions relates.<sup>70</sup> Esarhaddon uses similar language to record his imposition of “the lady Tabūa, who was raised in the palace of my father,” as ruler over the Arabs.<sup>71</sup> Bēl-ibni and Tabūa are relatively clear cases of patronal fosterage, since Babylon and Arabia were Assyrian subjects. The Esarhaddon-Urtaku exchange is not obviously cliental or patronal, as Assyria and Elam were more or less equals in this period.

It would seem reasonable to assume that the Achaemenid Persians (c. 550–330 B.C.E.) were influenced by these antecedents, but the evidence for the continuity of Near Eastern fosterage traditions under their empire is limited. To be sure, there is reason to believe that the Persians were exposed to the Assyrian model. Another Assyrian inscription records that one “Kuraš, king of the land of Parsumaš,” sent his oldest son, Arukku, to Aššurbanipal in c. 646 B.C.E. after the Assyrian sack of

65. Zawadzki 1995: 456.

66. Radner 2012: 473–74; cf. Richardson 2016: 53.

67. For the term, see Zawadzki 1995: 449–50.

68. SAA 16 001 = ABL 918; translation from Luukko and van Buylaere 2002: 4 (no. 1).

69. Carter and Stolper 1984: 49–50, quotation on 49; see also Waters 2000: 42–47.

70. RINAP 3/1, text 1, line 54; text and translation in Grayson and Novotny 2012: 36.

71. RINAP 4, text 1, column iv, lines 15–16; text and translation from Leichty 2011: 19. The phrase reoccurs several times in Esarhaddon’s inscriptions, with one major variation: in two places, Tabūa is said to have been raised in the palace of Esarhaddon’s father, Sennacherib (one is the text quoted above; the other is RINAP 4, text 6, column iii, lines 9–10 = Leichty 2011: 49). In two others, however, Esarhaddon states that she was raised in his own palace (RINAP 4, text 2, column ii, lines 60–62 = Leichty 2011: 30; RINAP 4, text 3, column iii, lines 3–5 = Leichty 2011: 38). A fifth inscription appears to repeat the phrase, but a lacuna conceals in whose palace Tabūa was raised (RINAP 4, text 97, lines 12–13 = Leichty 2011: 180). See also Eph’al 1982: 127–28.

Susa.<sup>72</sup> The identification of this Kuraš with Cyrus I, the grandfather of the Cyrus who founded the Persian empire, has proven to be contentious.<sup>73</sup> Even if the Kuraš of Aššurbanipal's inscription was not the direct ancestor of Cyrus the Great, however, the text clearly attests the circulation of royalty between Assyria and Persia in the run up to the Achaemenid empire's emergence.<sup>74</sup> Early Persian dynasts could therefore have been familiar with royal fosterage as a mode of interdynastic relations, and the Assyrians may have taught them to see pro-parentage as the prerogative of an overlord. Evidence that the Achaemenids actually exercised this prerogative, however, is thin.<sup>75</sup>

The more plentiful sources of the Hellenistic period (323–31 B.C.E.) herald a shift to cliental fosterage as the role of child rearer was delegated to a royal subordinate. Like the rulers of the Bronze Age, Hellenistic monarchs could refer to their royal peers as “brother” without biological basis, and other familial designations were employed as well.<sup>76</sup> For Macedonian royal families and the nobility who kept them in power, the primary mechanism for the creation of kinship bonds was the institution of the royal children (*paides basilikoi*, usually translated “royal pages”).<sup>77</sup> Housed at the king's court, this group comprised the sons of the realm's nobility, who grew up alongside the king's offspring. The children were supervised by a foster-father (*tropheus*), a dignitary of high but not royal rank. Philip II seems to have inaugurated the institution, and it is attested for all of the major Successor kingdoms.<sup>78</sup> Some scholars have tried to locate an earlier origin for the royal children in the Achaemenid empire or pre-Hellenistic Macedon, but ultimately the protohistory remains obscure.<sup>79</sup>

72. RINAP 5, text 12, column vi, lines 7–13; cf. RINAP 5, text 23, lines 114–17. Arukku is not mentioned in the second passage, on which see Waters 2011: 292–93. The text does not explicitly call Arukku a hostage (*liṭu* and *liṭūtu* in Akkadian), though several scholars identify him as such (Zawadski 1995: 458; Waters 2014: 35–36; Stronach 2019: 53–54). He appears nowhere else in the historical record.

73. On the problems with the identification, see Young 1988: 26–27; Briant 2002: 17–18, 878.

74. See Fuchs 2017: 267.

75. Xenophon writes that children of the nobility were educated at the Achaemenid king's court: Xen. *Anab.* 1.9.3; Cyr. 8.8.13; see further Briant 2002: 327–30; Klinkott 2005: 286 with n.29. But he also gives the impression that the Persian nobles themselves were usually in attendance, as well, so this is no indication that children would have been separated from their natal parents: see Xen. Cyr. 8.1.6, 16, 20. Akkadian and Aramaic texts do preserve the title “Son of the House,” which apparently extended the language of kinship to dignitaries who were not directly related to the Achaemenid family: Benveniste 1966: 22–26; Briant 2002: 310; Tuplin 2020: 31–38.

76. See esp. *OGIS* 257, line 2 (a letter from the Seleucid king Antiochus VIII (or IX) to Ptolemy X, in which the addressee is called *adelphos*). For further references, see Coloru 2012: 87–88.

77. For overviews of the institution, see Hammond 1989: 56–57; Strootman 2014: 136–44; Carney 2015: 207–16.

78. Strootman 2014: 136–37 with n.3.

79. Kienast 1973: 255 posits an Achaemenid origin, which Carney 2015: 208 finds “not so much wrong as simplistic.” Hammond 1990: 261–64 argues for the existence of the page service before Philip II; Lane Fox 2011: 215 disagrees.



Where sources are available, however, they reveal an institution that forged kinship between royalty and nobility, despite the constant possibility of dissension between kings and aristocrats. The Hellenistic monarch's need to keep the nobility in line has led some scholars to see the royal children as "quasi-hostages" on whom punishment might fall if their family failed to keep faith with the throne.<sup>80</sup> But while an implicit threat may indeed have existed, the institution's ability to create kinship ties was no less potent. Hellenistic inscriptions show that the designations "fosterer" (*tropheus*) and "foster-sibling" (*syntrophos*) were part of the titulature of high-ranking political figures.<sup>81</sup> Literary references also attest to the close bonds, both personal and political, that fosterage could create.<sup>82</sup> When the Seleucid dynast Demetrius I entered Roman hostageship, for instance, his *syntrophos* Apollonius apparently went with him.<sup>83</sup> Years later, when Demetrius contrived his escape, Apollonius and his two brothers were his closest confidants, and Demetrius's *tropheus* Diodorus paved the way for his return to the throne in Syria.<sup>84</sup> Even if the families of pages were compelled to send them to the king's court, such coercion was no impediment to the formation of kinships that shaped Hellenistic high politics.

While internal sources for the Parthian empire (c. 248 B.C.E.–224 C.E.) are scarce, the earliest relevant epigraphic evidence with a direct connection to the Arsacid family shows an Iranian cliental fosterage tradition emerging from Hellenistic precedents. The key testimony consists of two Greek inscriptions brought to light in 1996 during excavations at the site of Armaztsikhe/Bagineti in Georgia.<sup>85</sup> These show that political subordinates fostered Arsacid children. David Braund's edition of the texts runs as follows:<sup>86</sup>

80. Quotation from Grainger 1990: 6; cf. Golden 2009: 49; King 2018: 114.

81. Examples include Heliodorus, called *syntrophos* of Seleucus IV in several inscriptions (*IG* XI 4.1112, 1113, 1114; Savalli-Lestrade 1998: 44); Kraterus, foster-father of Antiochus IX (*OGIS* 256; Savalli-Lestrade 1998: 83); Apollodorus and Helenus, foster-fathers of Ptolemy X Alexander (Fayoum 1.5; *OGIS* 148; discussion in Van't Dak 1989/90; Savalli-Lestrade 1998: 383–84; Savalli-Lestrade 2017: 107); and Theophilus, foster-brother of Attalus (*SEG* 14.127; Savalli-Lestrade 1998: 153).

82. In addition to the foster-relations of the Seleucid Demetrius I (below), see Plut. *Alex.* 5 (Alexander the Great's relationship with his *tropheus* Leonidas); 2 Macc. 9.29 (Antiochus IV's body cared for by his *syntrophos* Philip).

83. Apollonius first appears at Polyb. 31.11.6, and seems to have been with Demetrius in Rome for some time. At 31.13.2, he is called *syntrophos*. Gera 1998: 261–62 and Savalli-Lestrade 2017: 104 assume a long co-captivity with Demetrius.

84. Polyb. 31.12.3, 13.1–3.

85. On the archeological context, see Nikolaishvili 2015: 178–80. On the place of the Greek language in Iberia, see Braund 1994: 212–13.

86. Text from Braund 2002: 23–27. Braund's text differs in some places from the original publication of Qaukhchishvili 1996 (in Georgian, which I do not read); cf. Traina 2004: 256. See further Labas 2014: 110; Nikolaishvili 2015: 179; de Jong 2017b: 87–88; Preud'homme 2019: 609–18.



... | Ἀρμενίας Οὐόλο- | γαίσου, γυναικὶ δὲ | βασιλέως Ἰβήρων | μεγάλου Ἀμαζάσ- |  
 που Ἀναγράνης ὁ | τροφεὺς καὶ ἐπίτρ- | <ο>πος ἰδία δυνάμ<ε>ι | τὸ βαλανῖον  
 ἀφιέρω- | σεν

[To the daughter(?) of] Walgaš, [king] of Armenia, (and to) the wife of Amazasp the Great, king of the Iberians, Anagranes the foster-father and guardian dedicated the bath building from his own resources.

... [βασι-] | λέως [Ἀναγ]ράνης [τρο]φεὺς [καὶ ἐπί-] | τροπο[ς ἰδία δυνάμ<ε>ι ? τὸ  
 βαλ]ανῖον ἄρτισας | ἰδία τροφίμη | Δρακόντιδι βασ- | ἰλίσ(σ)η ἀφιέρωσεν

... of. ... [ki]ng, [Anag]ranes the fost[er-father and guar]dian dedicated the ba[th  
 building(?)] having outfitted it [from his own resou]rces to his own foster-child,  
 queen Dracontis.

The fragmentary state of both texts precludes certainty, but since the inscriptions come from the same archeological context and indeed from the same structure, Braund concludes that the dedicator and the dedicatee of the two inscriptions are the same. That the dedicator was in both cases Anagranes seems almost certain, since the restoration of his name on the second stone is well supported by the names and titles on the first. Also reasonable, though less secure, is the argument that the dedicatee of both inscriptions was Dracontis. The name of the female dedicatee is absent from the first stone. But the dedicator, his titles, and perhaps the dedication (i.e., the bath building) are the same in both texts, and it stands to reason that Dracontis is the royal wife of the first inscription as well.<sup>87</sup>

If that identification is sound, the fosterage relationship attested by the texts can be situated with some confidence in a historical context. Dracontis was the daughter of Walgaš/Vologaeses, the Arsacid king of Armenia, and she was the wife of the Iberian king Amazasp/Amazpus. Neither the nomenclature nor the paleography supports a firm date, but the probable range can be narrowed down to the second or third century C.E. Two Arsacid kings of Armenia by the name of Walgaš are known for the second century.<sup>88</sup> There are many candidates for an Iberian king named Amazasp, including one mentioned in an inscription of the Sasanian king Shapur I (c. 262 C.E.).<sup>89</sup> There is not enough resolution in current chronologies of Armenian and Iberian kings to securely identify the figures, but considering the information at hand, it seems most likely that they lived in the late second or early third century C.E., and that the inscription dates to the same period.

87. For these arguments, see Braund 2002: 27. As he notes, it is unclear whether the second inscription refers to the bath-building as a whole, or merely a part of it. If the latter, the two texts may attest two distinct dedications.

88. For the Arsacid Armenian king list, see Toumanoff 1986: table 13. Specific dates are disputed; see Braund 2002: 30–31; Preud'homme 2019: 138–42.

89. ŠKZ 44 = Huyse 1999: 56–57; cf. Phiphia and Kobakhidze 2021: 928–31. On the Anagranes inscriptions in the context of marital politics in the ancient Caucasus, see Fabian 2021: 230.

The reconstructed inscriptions supply enough information to identify this fosterage arrangement as cliental. Anagranes was evidently a dignitary of high status, but he was not a king like Dracontis's father or husband. All the same, it is evident that "foster-father" was a position of honor, since Anagranes identifies himself as such in at least two (and possibly three) inscriptions.<sup>90</sup> He also takes care to identify Dracontis as "his own foster-daughter," a description that again underlines their fosterage relationship and the prestige that Anagranes derived from it. Unfortunately, the absence of an ethnonym obscures the details of Anagranes's role in relations between Arsacid Armenia and Iberia—a murky enough realm to begin with, to be sure.<sup>91</sup> The situation would have a different valence if he were an Armenian rather than an Iberian subject, for example, but the surviving text cannot be pressed for answers on this point. In any event, the inscription provides clear evidence that the Arsacid family sent its young dynasts to be fostered by cliental retainers, and moreover that fosterage bonds were recognized beyond the territory that their family directly ruled.<sup>92</sup>

Elsewhere in the Parthian west, inscriptions in Semitic languages shed further light on fosterage during the Arsacid period.<sup>93</sup> From Birecik Kalesi in southeastern Turkey, the Syriac epitaph of one Zarbiyan (6 C.E.) tells the reader that he was the *mrbyn* ' of one 'Awidallat.<sup>94</sup> The word *mrbyn* ' literally means "one who rears (a child)," and could be translated as tutor, fosterer, or guardian.<sup>95</sup> The title is again found within Parthian territory at Hatra in an Aramaic statue inscription for "Abdšalmā, *mrabbyānā* of Sanatruq, king of 'Arab."<sup>96</sup> The fostered child's designation as king of a nearby region points to the cliental nature of the arrangement, and while educational instruction may well have been part of the relationship, it would appear that (like the Greek *tropheus*) the *mrbyn* ' was a pro-parental role, not merely an academic one.<sup>97</sup> A final piece of Semitic evidence that may reflect a Parthian milieu is the *Hymn of the Pearl*, a Syriac text of uncertain date whose connections to Parthian society have been convincingly demonstrated by Markus

90. Anagranes' name may appear in one other Greek inscription from Georgia along with the title *tropheus*, but the text is too poorly preserved to draw any firm conclusions. See Qaukhchishvili 2009: 228–29; Labas 2014: 110; Preud'homme 2019: 610.

91. On Armenian-Iberian relations in this period, see Braund 1994: 224–45; Lenski 2002: 157.

92. Traina 2004: 260; Preud'homme 2019: 387–89. Both scholars situate Anagranes and Dracontis' relationship within the Armenian institution of *dayeakut 'iwn*, on which see further below.

93. On Aramaic in the Parthian empire, see generally Gzella 2008.

94. Text and translation from Drijvers and Healey 1999: 140.

95. Drijvers and Healey 1999: 142 translate "tutor," as do Hoftijzer and Jongeling 1995: 313 and Healey 2018: 60.

96. H 203 = Beyer 1998: 68–69 (on whose German translation I base my own translation above). On the name Abdšalmā, see Marcato 2018: 97. On H 203, see also Caquot 1964: 271; Retsö 2003: 445; Yon 2013: 168 n.31.

97. On the relationship between Hatra and 'Arab, cf. Drijvers and Healey 1999: 105; Palermo 2019: 242.

Zehnder and others.<sup>98</sup> At the outset of the poem, the narrator speaks of his early life spent in enjoyment of “the wealth and abundance of my *mrbyny*.”<sup>99</sup> The evident power and wealth of the narrator’s fosterer firmly situate the text in the realm of elite social relations, where children could apparently expect both emotional care and financial support from their fosterers.

The Semitic-language evidence from Parthia can be complemented by other documents from Roman territory, especially Palmyra. Eleonora Cussini has identified six Palmyrene epitaphs that commemorate fosterers, five of whom were foster mothers.<sup>100</sup> An additional funerary text commemorates a fosterage relation without an explicit title: “Maliku son of H[ . . . ] whom Makkibel brought up (*rby*). Alas!”<sup>101</sup> The derivation of *mrbyh* and *mrbyn* (the masculine form of the noun) from the verb *rby* (“to raise”) seems to outline the basic function of such figures, who assumed “a legal role as to upbringing and guardianship of children” that was evidently close enough to warrant inclusion in funerary inscriptions and even portraits.<sup>102</sup> South of Palmyra but still within Roman territory, a Nabataean inscription from Umm al-Djimal (present day northern Jordan) in Greek and Aramaic records that one “Fihr, son of Sullay” was the “foster-father of Gadhimat, king of Tanūkh.”<sup>103</sup> Grammatical problems with both the Greek and the Aramaic pose problems of interpretation and the use of Aramaic *rbw* to mean “fosterer” is unattested elsewhere, but the translation is supported by the word *tropheus* in the Greek text.<sup>104</sup> Though Michael Macdonald has challenged the conventional view, most scholars date the inscription to the mid-third century C.E. and identify Gadhimat with Djadhima al-Abrash, ruler of the southern Mesopotamian city of al-Hira (near present day Najaf in southern Iraq).<sup>105</sup> Nothing further is known of Fihr, but if he was indeed an inhabitant of Nabataea, then the inscription is provocative evidence for political fosterage across the Roman-Sasanian frontier.<sup>106</sup> These Semitic texts from Roman territory further attest to the prevalence of

98. Zehnder 2010: 237–48, esp. 239, with references. For the text’s connections to Parthian society, see also Russell 2004; de Jong 2017b: 87; Andrade 2018: 191–95.

99. *Hymn of the Pearl*, line 2; text and translation from Zehnder 2010: 248.

100. Cussini 2016: 51–52, citing PAT 2695, 0840, 1767, 1220, 2813, and 0839. The glossary in Hillers and Cussini 1996: 386 translates *mrbyh/mrbyn* as “foster-mother” and “foster-father,” respectively.

101. Translation of PAT 1769 from Cussini 2016: 52.

102. Cussini 2016: 52.

103. Petrantoni 2021: 67–70 (no. 16). The word here translated as “foster-father” is *tropheus* in the Greek and *rbw* in the Aramaic, on which see below.

104. Compare Mascitelli 2006: 233–35 with Hackl et al. 2003: 197, who translate *rbw* as “Erzieher” and note “[w]örtlich: ‘Grosser/Chef’; in der Bedeutung ‘Erzieher’ nur hier.”

105. Macdonald et al. 2015: 28–30. For the conventional view, see Hackl et al. 2003: 197–98; Shahid 2012. On Djadhima’s place of residence, contrast Powers 2011: 139–41 and Bowersock 1983: 132–33. See further Beeston and Shahid 2012; Morley 2017: 274–75.

106. Hackl et al. 2003: 198 n.610 note that the name Sullay (Fihr’s father) is well attested among the Nabataeans.

fostrage arrangements among elites in the Near East, and they suggest that such arrangements could cut across imperial boundaries.

Parthian fosterage is even observable in a Latin inscription from Rome, though this piece of evidence has never been connected to the social history of the practice in pre-Islamic Iran. The text records the renovation of a building by one Narcissus, who identifies himself as “a Parthian by birth,” a freedman of the emperor Antoninus Pius (r. 138–61 C.E.), and a pedagogue of (probably, though a lacuna precludes certainty) the emperor’s children. Most importantly, though, Narcissus calls himself the *papas* of Lysistrate, a freedwoman of the empress Faustina and a concubine of Pius.<sup>107</sup> Together with the related terms of *tata* and *mamma*, *papas* is a marker of kinship that can be a familiar or child’s word for a biological mother/father (like “mommy” or “daddy” in modern English), but it was also used for pro-parental figures without natal affiliation to the child.<sup>108</sup> Discussions of this inscription have situated it within its Roman context, foregrounding Narcissus’s pedagogical duties or the royal concubinage of his foster-daughter.<sup>109</sup> But the significance of the freedman’s Parthian heritage has been missed, and his origin can cast a different light on his self-description as *papas*: this freedman was proudly commemorating his cliental fosterage of the ruler’s consort, just as Anagranes had done in Iberia. *Papas* was Narcissus’s Latin translation of the role that his imperial homeland called *tro-pheus* in Greek, *mrabbyānā* in Aramaic, or, as discussed below, *dāyag* in Parthian. Despite the substantial wealth that Narcissus had amassed in Italy—the inscription commemorates his renovation of a building, after all—the virtual membership of Lysistrate in the imperial family must have made her analogous, in the eyes of her *papas* at least, to the fostered royalty of the Parthian empire like Dracontis or Sanatruq. After his manumission, then, Narcissus articulated and advertised his status not just in Roman terms, but in Parthian ones, too.

Parthian fosterage is also attested in Roman literary sources unrelated to the Arsacids of Rome, though the cases in question are ambiguous on the patronal/cliental issue. According to Josephus, the Parthian client king Monobazus of Adiabene sent his favorite son Izates to grow up with Abinerglos, the ruler of Spasinou Charax.<sup>110</sup> Josephus is a good authority for the life of Izates, whose conversion to Judaism forged a strong bond between Adiabene and Judaea, so the passage is reliable evidence for horizontal fosterage links among the client kings of the Parthian empire.<sup>111</sup> The case is not clearly cliental or patronal, however, since there is no obvious way to hierarchize Adiabene and Mesene. Even more obscure is

107. *CIL* 6.8972 = *ILS* 1836, trans. Gardner and Wiedemann 1991: 62; cf. Demandt 1997: 94; Boatwright 2021: 114.

108. Bradley 1991: 76–102; Stawoska-Jundziłł 2002 (in Polish, which I do not read).

109. Mohler 1940: 266–68; Edmondson 2014: 573; Wheeler 2016: 194–95; Boatwright 2021: 114.

110. Joseph. *AJ* 20.22–23, 20.34. On Abinerglos/Abinergaos I, see Schuol 2000: 226–27, 320–26.

111. On Izates’ conversion and Judaism in Adiabene, see Neusner 1964; Marciak 2014: 16–19, with references.

another scene in Josephus from the reign of Ardawān II. The Parthians temporarily deposed Ardawān and replaced him with an otherwise unknown figure named Cinnamus, but Cinnamus subsequently abdicated and returned the kingship. He did so, Josephus writes, because “he had been raised by [Ardawān].”<sup>112</sup> If Ardawān had raised Cinnamus while he was king and was not his natal father, then the story might refer to a patronal fosterage arrangement. However, Cinnamus is nowhere else attested in either Parthian sources or Roman literature, and the historicity of this passage has been questioned.<sup>113</sup> Finally, Tacitus describes the same Ardawān as “having grown up among the Dahae” and “brought up among the Scythians.”<sup>114</sup> The phrases need not mean that Ardawān was fostered among the Dahae away from his natal parents and/or the Arsacid court, but it is possible to understand them in this way, as Marek Olbrycht suggests.<sup>115</sup> The latter two cases are problematic, and even the collective three do not, in and of themselves, point to a wider Parthian institution. When read alongside the attestations of *tropheus* and *mrbyn*’ in Parthian epigraphy, however, the passages suggest that instances of Parthian fosterage came to the attention of Roman authors, even if those observers lacked the social context to understand such exchanges.

Sources from ancient China for a potential Arsacid at the Han court adumbrate a tantalizing parallel to classical historiography on the Arsacids of Rome, though the case is ultimately too dubious to admit for consideration. A diverse set of late antique Chinese sources refers to a figure named An Shigao, who was, in the words of one biographical text, an “attending son (*shizi*) of the king of Anxi” at the court of the Han dynasty.<sup>116</sup> Another An Shigao of the Han period features in Buddhist sources, which remember him as a translator of Buddhist texts into Chinese. Some authors in this tradition also call him a prince of Anxi.<sup>117</sup> Since it is generally accepted that Anxi is a Chinese transcription of Aršak/Arsaces, some scholars have assumed that An Shigao was an Arsacid prince from the Parthian empire.<sup>118</sup> This identification is doubtful, however, because the geographic referent of “Anxi” is disputed, and other historians put An Shigao’s homeland in Indo-Parthia, Bactria, or Margiana.<sup>119</sup> If he were indeed a dynast from Parthia’s ruling family, the Arsacids of Rome might have had counterparts at the other end

112. Joseph. *AJ* 20.63–65.

113. Chaumont 1991.

114. Tac. *Ann.* 2.3.1, 6.41.2. The ethnonyms are not incompatible, since Roman authors used the label “Scythian” as an umbrella term for diverse peoples of the Eurasian steppe; see e.g. Strab. 11.8.2.

115. Olbrycht 1998c: 142. On the Dahae, see Potts 2014: 89–94; Olbrycht 2021a: 21–25, 32–34, 123–25.

116. *Wei shu* 30.712, trans. Forte 1995: 14–15. The “secular” sources are collected and discussed in Forte 1995: 13–63. On the term *shizi*, cf. Yang 1952: 509.

117. Forte 1995: 65–90; Zacchetti 2019.

118. E.g., Golze and Storm in Hackl et al. 2010: 3.510; additional references in Zacchetti 2019.

119. de la Vaissère 2005: 77–78 (Indo-Parthia); Tremblay 2007: 80, 92–93 (Bactria or Bukhara); Utz 2012: 180–82 (Margiana); Kotyk 2024: 18–21. Cf. Forte 1995: 80; Zacchetti 2019 (noncommittal).

of Eurasia whom the Chinese, much like the Romans, described as hostages surrendered to the seat of their universal empire.<sup>120</sup> On balance, though, An Shigao was probably not an Arsacid.

Arsacid history is on much firmer ground in late antique Armenia (63–428 C.E.), where historiographical sources supply strong evidence for cliental fosterage. Armenian authors make oblique but frequent reference to the institution of *dayeakut* ‘*iwn*, a form of fosterage whereby a child of noble birth was reared by foster-parents outside of his or her clan. The fosterer was called a *dayeak*, a word of Iranian origin whose root meaning is “wet nurse” or “nurturer.”<sup>121</sup> Whereas in modern Persian *dāyeh* has come to mean “wet nurse,” in antiquity the term applied not only to women but also to male fosterers. The late antique Armenian histories reveal that youths of the Arsacid clan were routinely raised by noble Armenian families who were subordinate to the Arsacid king.<sup>122</sup> *Dayeakut* ‘*iwn* was also related to, and overlapped with, a Georgian form of the practice, known from late antique and early medieval Georgian texts, in which the fosterer was called the *mamamdzudze*.<sup>123</sup> In the Armenian context, *dayeakut* ‘*iwn* arrangements were predominantly cliental, because the Arsacid dynasty that held the kingship sent its children to powerful but still subordinate families among the Armenian nobility.

This background is critical, for one Armenian historian supplies the sole explicit reference to the Arsacids of Rome that does not belong to the Greek and Latin sources of the Roman tradition. Despite the manifest importance of such evidence, the scholarly literature has never connected the passage in question to the Arsacids of the Julio-Claudian period. The report comes from the *History of Movses Khorenats* ‘*i*, a text that purports to belong to the fifth century C.E., though most scholars now put its composition in the eighth.<sup>124</sup> The Arsacids of Rome are mentioned in the portion of the narrative that deals with Abgar, a composite figure based on the historical Abgar V of Edessa but subsumed by Movses into the ranks of Armenian kings. In Movses’s telling, Abgar had a complex relationship with the Roman empire, becoming tributary to the Romans during the reign of Augustus, but subsequently fighting a war against the Judaean king Herod alongside “Arshavir, king of Persia”—a Parthian king who is himself a composite figure and does

120. On this Sinocentrism, see Golze and Storm in Hackl et al. 2010: 3.484; Rawski 2012: 234–35.

121. Bremmer 1976: 66–67 adduces no Iranian or Armenian evidence for his view that *dayeak* means “mother’s brother,” and his contention that “among the [ancient] Persians fosterage found place at the home of the MoBr” is untenable. On the avunculate, see Potts 2023: 37–45.

122. Bedrosian 1984 (esp. 23 for the use of *dayeak* to indicate male fosterers); Bedrosian 1994; Garsoïan 1989: 521; Thomson and Howard-Johnston 1999: 48 n.297, 331; Meyer 2017: 308; Read 2023: 15–16. On the word in Iranian languages, see Omidisalar and Omidisalar 1996.

123. Rapp 2003: 271; Rapp 2009: 673; Phiphia and Kobakhidze 2021: 928.

124. Thomson 1978: 60; Russell 1986: 254–55; Darling Young 2018: 82. Contrast Traina 2007: 158, favoring an earlier date.

not map neatly onto any historical Arsacid. Movses writes the following about that war's resolution:<sup>125</sup>

Ձկնի ոչ բազում ատուրց վախճանի Աւգոստոս, եւ փոխանակ նորա թագաւորէ Հռովմայեցոց Տիբեր. եւ Գերմանիկոս կեսար եղեալ՝ ձաղէ զառաքեալսն ի Հռովմ զիշխանսն Արշարի եւ Աբգարու, յաղագս պատերազմին նոցա, յորում սպանին զեղբարորդին Հերովդի: Ընդ որ խստացեալ Աբգարու, խորհի ապստամբութիւն եւ պատրաստութիւն պատերազմի:

Not many days afterward, Augustus died, and in his place, Tiberius became king of the Romans. Germanicus became Caesar and used in his triumph the princes whom Abgar and Arshavir had sent to Rome on account of the war in which they killed the nephew of Herod. Abgar bristled at this. He contemplated rebellion, and prepared for war.

To be clear, the passage is evidence for the Armenian reception of the events in question, not the events themselves. Movses conflates different personages, transposes various events, and is disingenuous as to his source material; for what actually happened, he is not the place to turn. For the Armenian *memory* of the Arsacids of Rome, however, he is useful and revealing. Movses does not use the language of fosterage or hostageship in describing these children, but he does give a sense of the power dynamics behind their exchange. Both Abgar and the Arsacid king Arshavir sent royal sons to Rome after their war against Herod. The boys were then put on display by the “Caesar” Germanicus when he led them in a triumph. Is this corroboration of Arsacid hostageship in a non-Roman source? Does Movses describe Roman domination of the east through the forcible extraction of royal children?

In fact, the opposite is the case: the section assumes the superiority of the givers of children. To be sure, the princes of Abgar and Arshavir were sent to Rome in the wake of a war with Herod, a Roman subject. But this was a war that they *won*, killing Herod's nephew and putting his army of “Thracians and Germans” to flight.<sup>126</sup> The children of the Armenian and Arsacid kings thus went off to Rome in the wake of their fathers' victory, not their defeat. Moreover, Movses writes that Abgar became angry when he learned of Germanicus's insulting use of his children. This reaction indicates the subversion of his expectations for how they would be treated. The degrading ordeal of triumphal exhibition is well captured in Movses's use of the word *dzaghem* to describe what Germanicus did to the princes. The verb can mean “to lead in triumph” but also “to deride, mock, jeer at.”<sup>127</sup> Such humiliation did not accord with Abgar's understanding of the exchange, and the discrepancy

125. MKh 2.27.2–3.

126. MKh 2.26.

127. Petrosian 1879: 425; Martirosyan 2010: 336. Thomson 1978: 165 n.2 points to Movses's use of the Armenian translation of Eusebius's *Chronicle* here, but that text says that “Germanicus triumphed over the Parthians” (Aucher 1818: 2.262). Movses must have learned of the princes elsewhere.



was sufficient grounds for him to abandon his earlier accommodation with Rome and plan for war. Movses says nothing of Arshavir's reaction, but since the Armenian and Parthian kingdoms act in lockstep in this section, there is every reason to attribute the same sentiments to him. In Armenian tradition, then, the memory of the Arsacids of Rome diverges from their portrayal in the Greek and Latin sources of the Roman empire. Those who submitted them did so not from weakness but from strength—a move fully in keeping with the cliental *dayeakut 'iwn* system as it emerges from other Armenian historians of the Arsacid period.

Moreover, the Armenian sources attest that cliental fosterage arrangements were not confined to Arsacid Armenia; they also were to be found at the highest levels of the Sasanian empire (224–651 C.E.). To take one example from the fifth century C.E., the brothers Hormozd III and Peroz fought for the Sasanian throne in a bout of internecine strife that the latter would eventually win. Reports of the war survive in two Armenian authors, Ghazar and Eghishē, contemporaries who were much concerned with resurgent Sasanian influence in Armenia during this period.<sup>128</sup> Both historians hold that Peroz's foster-father was the decisive element in his victory. Eghishē's more extensive report says:<sup>129</sup>

Իսկ կրտսեր որդւոյն Յազկերտի դայեակն, Ռահամ անուն ի Միհրան տոհմէն, թէպէտ եւ ետես զգունդն Արեաց ընդ երկուս բաժանեալ, սակայն կիսովն զազանաբար յարձակեցաւ ի վերայ երեց որդւոյ թագաւորին. հար, սատակեաց զգունդն, եւ ձերբակալ արարեալ զորդի թագաւորին՝ անդէն ի տեղւոջն հրամայէր սպանանել: Եւ զմնացեալ զաւրսն ածէր հաւանեցուցանէր, եւ առնէր միաբանութիւն ամենայն Արեաց գնդին. եւ թագաւորեցուցանէր զիր սանն, որում անուն էր Պերոզ:

The fosterer (*dayeak*) of Yazdgird's [= Yazdgird II] younger son [= Peroz], Raham by name from the Mihran family, though he saw that the army of the Iranians was divided in two, nevertheless with one half he fiercely attacked the king's elder son [= Hormozd]. He defeated and massacred his [= Hormozd's] army, and having captured the king's son ordered him to be put to death on the spot. He took control of the remaining forces and won them over, and he effected the unity of the entire army of the Iranians. Then he crowned his own foster-child (*san*), who was named Peroz.

The relevant passage in Ghazar is briefer, but it too mentions Peroz's connection to the Mihrān.<sup>130</sup> This family numbered among the great noble houses of Sasanian Iran. While it was a powerful force in its own right, it operated under the

128. For the history of this succession struggle, see Shahbazi 2004a; Pourshariati 2008: 71, 300 n.1725, both of whom privilege the Armenian sources.

129. Egh. 197 = Ter-Minasyan 1957: 197; cf. Thomson 1982: 242 for complete English translation.

130. GhP 60, 64; translation in Thomson 1991: 159, 166; Bedrosian 1985: 204, 217 (where the translation makes clear that Peroz has been raised by a *dayeak*). Ghazar's text specifies that Peroz's foster-brother was Yezatvšnasp, son of Aštāt from the house of Mihrān.



suzerainty of the Sasanian dynasty.<sup>131</sup> Thus, Rāham of the Mihrān was a figure like Anagranes or the Armenian *dayeaks* of late antiquity—a member of the political elite who fostered a young dynast from a royal family superior to his own.

Nor is it necessary to rely solely on Armenian texts for cliental fosterage under the Sasanians, because the institution is also evident in Iranian sources. Valuable testimony comes from the inscription of Shapur I at the Ka'ba-ye Zardošt (ŠKZ), a trilingual inscription in Middle Persian, Parthian, and Greek at Naqsh-e Rostam in Iran (c. 262 C.E.).<sup>132</sup> The end of the text includes a list of dignitaries who lived during Shapur's reign and administered the empire as his subordinates. Among them are two fostered children. The Parthian version of the inscription reads:<sup>133</sup>

s' sn BRBYTA ME pty prdkn HHSNt AHRN s' sn BRBYTA ME pty ktwkn HHSNt  
Sāsān wispuhr, čē pad Farragān derd, any Sāsān wispuhr čē pad Kadugān derd

... Sasan, the prince who was brought up in (the house of) Farragān; another Sasan, the prince who was brought up in (the house of) Kadugān.

The operative word here is the Arameogram *HHSNt* for the Parthian verb *derdan*, “to have,” or (as here) “to raise.”<sup>134</sup> The Greek text likewise describes the two Sasans as, respectively, “reared in the house of Farragān” and “brought up in the house of Kadugān.”<sup>135</sup> In other words, the inscription specifies that these two noble youths were raised by pro-parents who were not, it would appear, their natal kin.

The rank of the two figures indicates that their fosterage was cliental rather than patronal—in other words, that their upbringing was delegated to a subordinate. Both foster-sons are called *wispuhr* in the Parthian and Middle Persian texts and *tou eg basileōn* (“those near the kings”) in the Greek—that is, as princes. The designation allows for a closer look at their political status. Based on the inscriptional evidence from the ŠKZ and elsewhere, scholars have found that the Sasanian nobility was organized into four tiers. At the top were the kings (*šahrdārān*), below them the princes (*wispuhrān*), and in the third and fourth ranks the greater and lesser nobles (*wuzurgān* and *āzādān*, respectively).<sup>136</sup> The two Sasans of ŠKZ 45 both belonged to the second tier, that of the princes. As for their foster parents, the Kadugān are

131. On the Mihrān in the Sasanian empire, see Pourshariati 2008: 70–75, 103–4; Maksymiuk 2015.

132. On the date, see Huyse 1999: 10–14.

133. ŠKZ 45; transliteration and transcription from Huyse 1999: 57. The Parthian is privileged here not because it may have been the primary version of the text from which the Middle Persian and Greek versions were produced (on which question see Rubin 2002: 270–77, with references), but because it is better preserved.

134. Gignoux 1972: 52.

135. The Greek verbs are *trephō* and *anatrophō*, both of which were used for child-rearing in ancient Greek. See Griffith 2010: 301.

136. Lukonin 1983: 698–99; Wiesehöfer 1993: 228–29; Hauser 2005: 193–94. The terms here are provided in Middle Persian.

mentioned nowhere else in the inscription, but members of the Farragān are found in two other passages, which reveal that the family had played a prominent role in the Sasanian empire since its inception.<sup>137</sup> They are not, however, identified as members of the first two tiers, and it therefore seems that they belong to the third or fourth—a great noble family, but not at the apex of Sasanian society.<sup>138</sup>

This passage from the Shapur inscription thus shows the use of cliental fosterage among the Sasanian ruling classes—another indication that ancient Iranian royalty could be raised by families who were politically subordinate to their own. Judging by their identification as “princes,” the two Sasans were members of the royal family or closely related to it (though not direct descendants of Shapur himself).<sup>139</sup> Their foster-parents, meanwhile, were prominent members of the nobility, but not royalty. The situation is similar to the one recounted in Ghazar and Eghishē above: the status of the Kadugān and Farragān closely matches the Mihrān, the family that both the Armenian authors name as the raisers of royal children. In Arsacid Armenia and Sasanian Iran, then, fosterage helped build and strengthen the relationships between monarchs and nobles.

Additional evidence for cliental fosterage in the Sasanian period comes from Syriac literature on the engagement between Iranians and Christians in late antiquity. Richard Payne discusses a case from a Syriac martyr act in which an Iranian named Mihryar entrusts his son Yazdin to a Christian foster-father. The text is clear on the distribution of power between the two parties: Mihryar was a preeminent figure in the region, “distinguished more than all the other Magians before the king,” whereas the Christians were recently resettled captives.<sup>140</sup> Cliental fosterage, the text shows, was a key mechanism for the integration of this community into the political structures of the Sasanian empire. The institution also emerges as a problematic in the writings of Mar Aba, a patriarch of the sixth century C.E. who sought to police the fractious East Syrian Christian community and its relationship to Sasanian and Zoroastrian authorities. One of his reforms interdicted the fosterage of East Syrian elite children by members of the clergy, forbidding the latter to “be foster fathers (*mrabyana*) or guardians for the worldly,” as Mar Aba set down in the synod of 544 C.E.<sup>141</sup> In his efforts to promote solidarity among ecclesiastical leaders and strengthen the institutional coherence of the Church of the East, the patriarch felt it necessary to dissolve the bonds of kinship that could link clerical

137. ŠKZ 40, 43. The former passage attests that one Farrag was already an important figure under King Pabag, father of the dynasty’s founder Ardashir.

138. Lukonin 1983: 705.

139. Cf. Lukonin 1983: 703.

140. Translation from Payne 2015: 67, after the text of Bedjan 1891: 560. See also Widengren 1969: 75. The highly fragmentary Sogdian version of the act preserves mention of the child’s foster-parents (*zynbrt*), but not their religion: Sims-Williams 1985: 32.

141. Translation from Payne 2015: 103, after the text of Chabot 2010 [1902]: 82 (French translation on 335).

fosterers to the children of secular East Syrian elites. “For Mar Aba,” Payne writes, “[fosterage] generated precisely the personal loyalties and sectional interests that prevented bishops and lesser clergy from acting in concert with their superiors as representatives of an empire-wide universal church.”<sup>142</sup> Thus Mar Aba’s prohibition reveals not only the adoption of Iranian fosterage by non-Iranian subjects of the Sasanian empire, but the ability of the institution to create consequential political relationships that could require regulation.

It must also be entered into evidence, however, that one key Sasanian source supports the patronal fosterage model, not the cliental one. The text in question is the *Kārnāmag ī Ardaxšēr ī Pābagān* (The Book of the Deeds of Ardashir, Son of Pabag), a literary composition in Middle Persian that tells the story of the Sasanian dynasty’s founder. It was committed to writing during the late Sasanian or early Islamic period, and as a source for the historical setting of the tale in the third century C.E., it is of little value.<sup>143</sup> The *Kārnāmag*’s account of Ardashir’s life is steeped in myth, legend, and heroic archetypes, and few scholars put much stock in its narrative of his birth and early career.<sup>144</sup> All the same, the text reflects the late Sasanian and early Islamic milieu in which it was composed and redacted, and as such it can shed light on prevailing social attitudes and institutions during the formative centuries of Middle Persian literature.<sup>145</sup>

One passage from the *Kārnāmag* speaks to the conditions under which an Iranian ruler might send his children to the court of the king of kings who ruled over him. At the beginning of the story, Ardashir is born and raised at the house of Pabag, a provincial governor of Pars under Ardawān IV, the last Arsacid king. When Ardawān hears of Pabag’s distinguished adopted son, he insists that the boy be sent to his court:<sup>146</sup>

Ka Ardaxšēr ō dād ī pānzdah sālag rasīd, āgāhih ō Ardawān mad, kū Pābag rāy pus-ēw ast ī pad frahang [ud] aswārih frahixtag [ud] abāyišnīg. U-š nāmag ō Pābag kard, kū amā ēdōn ašnūd kū ašmā rāy pus-ēw ast ī abāyišnīg, pad frahang [ud] aswārih abēr frahixtag, u-mān kāmag, kū ōy dar [ī] amā frēstē ud nazdik \*ī amā āyēd, tā abāg frazandān [ud] wāspuhragān bawēd, u-š pad frahang ī-š ast bar [ī] pādašn framāyēm. Pābag, az ān čiyōn Ardawān mas kāmgārtar būd, juddar kardan ud ān

142. Payne 2015: 103.

143. On the dating, see Cereti 2011, discussing the conclusions of Grenet 2003: 26, 116–17, 125.

144. For discussions of the literary and historical nature of the *Kārnāmag*, see Grenet 2003; Yarshater 1983: 365; Cereti 2001: 192–200; Cereti 2011; Stoneman 2012: 12–14; Macuch 2013: 290; Askari 2016: 87–88; Daryaei 2016: 138. For historically oriented treatments of Ardashir’s heritage and career, see Huff 2008; Macuch 2014.

145. On the dating of the compositions that are now analyzed under the label of Middle Persian or Pahlavi literature, see Macuch 2009: 116–21; Daryaei 2018: 104.

146. *Kārnāmag ī Ardaxšēr ī Pābagān* 2.5–9; transcription from Grenet 2003: 58–60. Ardashir is also fostered out in Tabari’s *History*, though in that work his foster-father is a eunuch named Tīrā who subsequently adopts him. See Tabari 1.815 = Bosworth 1999: 6.

framān bē spōxtan nē šāyist. U-š, andar zamān, Ardaxšēr ārāstag, abāg dah bandag ud was čiš [i] abd wēšist [ud] sazāgwār ō pēš Ardawān frestīd.

When Ardashir reached the age of fifteen years, Ardawān learned that Pabag had a son who was skilled and accomplished in matters of learning and horsemanship. He wrote a letter to Pabag, which said: “We have heard that you have a son who is accomplished and very skilled in matters of learning and horsemanship, and it is our will that you send him to our court and that he be near us, so that he may associate with our children and princes, and I may order profit and reward for him in accordance with his learning.” As Ardawān was very great and powerful, Pabag was not able to do otherwise or reject this command, and he immediately sent Ardashir well-equipped with ten servants and many wonderful and marvelous things for the acceptance of Ardawān.

There is no single word in the text to describe what Ardashir’s role will be once he reaches the court of Ardawān, so it is difficult to label the social institution that the passage describes. The power dynamics, however, are clearly articulated. Ardawān is the superior, a “very great and powerful” king whose commands Pabag cannot disobey. The ruler who sends his son—or, in this case, his adopted son—is subordinate to the ruler who will serve as the child’s parent.

The patronal direction of the transfer mirrors the Egyptian and Assyrian practices of the pre-Hellenistic period. Ardawān wants Ardashir at his court so that the boy can “be near” him, associate with his children, and receive favors commensurate with his abilities. In other words, Ardawān wants to control Ardashir’s advancement within the ranks of the Parthian empire’s administration. The child’s road to power and prestige must run through the Arsacid court. Meanwhile, through his association with Ardawān’s sons, Ardashir will bond with the dynasts who will be his peers in running the Arsacid empire—and, in the case of Ardawān’s eldest son, with the boy who will one day reign as king of kings. The parallels with the pharaonic nursery and the Assyrian court are clear, and the case suggests that the traditions of patronal fosterage may have been observed even at the end of pre-Islamic Iranian antiquity.

Further Middle Persian evidence comes from Zoroastrian texts, which like the *Kārnāmag* were mostly composed under the Sasanians but redacted after the Arab conquests. The religious orientation of these works makes them obscure sources for political and social history, and they shed little light on the patronal/cliental question. In one dialogue between Ahura Mazda and Zoroaster, for instance, the god tells his prophet that “each one of us [the Immortal Amahraspands, an order of divinities] has given to the material world a *dāyag* of our own, through whom they accomplish in the material world the activity that is uniquely theirs in the spiritual world.”<sup>147</sup> That is, each god has a representative in the material world of

147. *Šāyest nē šāyest* 15.4 = Kotwal 1969: 57–58.

human beings that fosters the activity unique to the god. Ahura Mazda's fosterer is the just man, for example, because such an individual nourishes in the material world the justice that Ahura Mazda dispenses in the spiritual one.<sup>148</sup> It is difficult to draw conclusions about political fosterage arrangements on the basis of these passages, though they do show that the word *dāyag* and its derivatives were evocative of care and nourishment.<sup>149</sup> However, a more useful passage comes from the *Pahlavi Rivāyat*. As the hero Kersasp speaks with Ahura Mazda and Zoroaster about his battle with the dragon Gandarw, he mourns that his enemy "dragged away my wife, and he dragged away my father and my *dāyag*."<sup>150</sup> The fosterer is included among the speaker's closest family relations, and is mentioned in the same breath as his father. The Zoroastrian texts therefore show that a *dāyag* numbered among one's most intimate kin.

New Persian literature composed after the Arab conquests offers mixed testimony on patronal and cliental fosterage in pre-Islamic Iran, but the cliental model remains better represented on balance. Like the Middle Persian *Kārnāmag*, the *Shahnameh* (Book of Kings) of the tenth/eleventh century C.E. author Ferdowsi describes the patronal fosterage of Ardashir at the court of Ardawān IV.<sup>151</sup> However, later episodes in the Sasanian section of the *Shahnameh* show the cliental model in operation. Clientage is prominent in the story of Bahram Gur (= Bahram V, r. 420–38 C.E.), a Sasanian prince raised among the Arabs by the Nasrid king Monzer.<sup>152</sup> The episode begins with the following speech delivered by the advisers of Yazdgird I, Bahram's father. The Yazdgird of the *Shahnameh* is a tyrannical king, so his advisers make the case that his son should be raised elsewhere:<sup>153</sup>

ز پیغاره دورست و از سرزنش،	بگفتند کین کودک برمنش
به هر کشوری باز و پیمان تست،	جهان سربسر زیر فرمان تست
ز داننده کشور به رامش بود،	نگه کن به جایی که دانش بود
که باشد ز کشور بر او آفرین،	ز پرمایگان دایگانی گزین
ز فرمان او شاد گردد جهان!	هنر گیرد این شاخ خرم نهان

148. *Šāyest nē šāyest* 15.5–8 = Kotwal 1969: 58–59.

149. Also of unclear import for political fosterage are two appearances of *dāyag* in the Parthian Manichaean text *The Sermon of the Soul*: see Sundermann 1997: 64, 68, 121 (sections 60, 83) with Sundermann 1991: 14.

150. *Pahlavi Rivāyat Accompanying the Dādestān ī Dēnīg* 18f12, transcription from Williams 1990: 105. Cf. Widengren 1969: 78–79.

151. For the verses from this section that pertain to fosterage, see Khaleghi-Motlagh and Omid-salar 2005: 143 line 150; 145 line 175; 146 lines 190–93; 147 line 204.

152. On the other sources for the fosterage of Bahram Gur, see Toral-Niehoff 2014: 64 n.31, 69 n.54, 81; Munt et al. 2015: 458–59, 499–500; Hanaway 1988. On al-Hira, the residence of Monzer, see Toral-Niehoff 2013; Fisher 2020: 97–99. Bahram's cliental fosterage is paralleled in a passage from the mythical section of the *Shahnameh* where the hero Rustam serves as *dāyeh* to Siyavash, the son of the Iranian king Kay Kavus; see Khaleghi-Motlagh 1990: 207, line 74.

153. Ferdowsi, *Shahnameh* = Khaleghi-Motlagh and Omid-salar 2005: 364–65, lines 52–56.

"This child," they said, "is blameless and beyond reproach. The world is entirely under your command. From every land you extract tribute or promises of allegiance. Look for a place where knowledge exists, and the country thrives thanks to the presence of the wise. From the nobility there, pick someone to serve as a fosterer (*dāyagān*) so that he may earn the country's praise. There this tender-hearted sprout can learn his craft, and the world can be made joyful under his reign."

The operative word is *dāyagān*, technically a plural noun but used here as a singular with the meaning "fosterer."<sup>154</sup> Elsewhere in the poem, Middle Persian *dāyag* yields to classical / New Persian *dāyeh*, which like its predecessor can mean either "nurse" or "foster-parent." The abstract noun *dāyagānī* for its part can signify not just an activity but an office—it is the act of nursing and especially breastfeeding, but also the institutional position of the fosterer.<sup>155</sup>

Along with the other sources for Bahram's life, Ferdowsi's account underlines the cliental nature of this fosterage arrangement as well as the politically consequential kinship that it created. All of the delegates whom Yazdgird considers as potential fosterers—including, tellingly, a set of representatives from Rome—declare their submission before the Sasanian king, calling themselves his "servants." Monzer applies this label to himself, as well.<sup>156</sup> Once Bahram is in Monzer's custody, Ferdowsi illustrates the kinship force of fosterage in his description of Bahram's dual lineage, which becomes both Arab and Persian. Monzer's first act is to find wet nurses for the Sasanian prince; he chooses "two Arabs and two Persians" for his breastfeeding (*dāyagānī*).<sup>157</sup> The combination is meaningful: breast milk was (and is) a kinship-forging substance in a variety of Near Eastern traditions, so Bahram's nurses connect him with his Persian origin while creating a kinship bond with the Arabs, as well.<sup>158</sup> That bond will turn out to be a close one. After reaching manhood, Bahram initially returns to his father, but then despairs at his poor treatment at Yazdgird's hands. In a letter to a Roman envoy about

154. For the plural form but singular meaning of *dāyagān* in this passage and elsewhere, see Dehkhoda's *Lexicon* (Dehkhoda and Mu' in 1947) s.v. *dāyagān*.

155. See the lexical entries on *dāyeh* and *dāyagānī* in Wolff 1933: 364; see also Khaleghi-Motlagh 2012: 86.

156. Ferdowsi, *Shahnameh* = Khaleghi-Motlagh and Omidasalar 2005: 365–67, lines 57–81 (trans. Davis 2006: 601–2). Monzer identifies himself as the "servant" (*bandeh*) of Yazdgerd and Bahram on lines 74 and 79, respectively; the rest of the delegates do the same on line 67. Romans are referred to in lines 58 and 70. The inclusion of Rome among Bahram's potential foster-homes is also mentioned by Tabari (1.854 = Bosworth 1999: 82).

157. Ferdowsi, *Shahnameh* = Khaleghi-Motlagh and Omidasalar 2005: 367, line 91. Tabari reports the same story (though with one Persian nurse rather than two) at 1.855 = Bosworth 1999: 82–83; cf. Munt et al. 2015: 458–59.

158. On breastmilk as a substance that creates kinship in Near Eastern traditions, see Chapman 2012 on biblical literature; Altorki 1980; Parkes 2005; Schine 2019: 170; Rahbari 2020 on Islamic literature and jurisprudence. On the role of substances in different cultural ideas about kinship, see Carsten 1991: 425–26 on food; Carsten 2011 on blood.

his plight, he laments, “[Yazdgird] might as well send me to my *dāyagān*, since I prefer Monzer to my mother and father!”<sup>159</sup> He soon returns to Monzer in Yemen and, following Yazdgird’s death, a war for the throne begins. Monzer’s financial and military support is a decisive factor in this conflict, and with the help of his foster-father, Bahram eventually wins the succession struggle.

In addition to the *Shahnameh*, another work of New/Classical Persian poetry provides additional evidence for cliental fosterage in pre-Islamic Iran. This is *Vis and Ramin*, a romance composed under Seljuk rule by Fakhraddin Gorgani. As with the *Shahnameh*, the dating of *Vis and Ramin* is a complex matter. On the one hand, the poem is a composition of an exceptional literary talent who wrote in the eleventh century C.E., but on the other, the story it relates is certainly older, and perhaps much older.<sup>160</sup> In fact, Vladimir Minorsky and Mary Boyce specifically thought the origins of the tale dated to the Parthian period—a plausible (though not provable) idea that has found broad (though not universal) support.<sup>161</sup> At the very least, the notion of a Parthian provenance accounts for some features of the work that are otherwise difficult to explain. Early in the story, for instance, the protagonist Vis marries her brother Viru.<sup>162</sup> Such a union would be forbidden under Islamic law and custom, but it was acceptable and indeed encouraged in pre-Islamic Iran, when such arrangements were not only tolerated but promoted under the Zoroastrian tradition of next-of-kin marriage (*xwēdōdah*).<sup>163</sup> Such glimpses into the poem’s social world strongly suggest a pre-Islamic substrate, even if this layer is intertwined with later accretions.

One such facet of *Vis and Ramin*’s cultural milieu is fosterage among elites, the social class to which all of the poem’s main characters belong. The practice is central to the poem’s plot, because its title characters first meet as children in foster care. “The moment [Vis] was born from her mother [Shahru], her mother gave her to a *dāyagān* who took her to Khuzan, where she lived and had house and home,” the poet writes.<sup>164</sup> Ramin is also reared by this woman, who throughout the

159. Ferdowsi, *Shahnameh* = Khaleghi-Motlagh and Omidisalar 2005: 384, line 298.

160. See Cross 2015: 32 on a reference to the story in the work of the Abbasid poet Abu Nuwās, who died in the early ninth century C.E.; Nuwās names the story of Vis and Ramin among other relics of pre-Islamic Iran like the Avesta.

161. Minorsky 1964: 151–99; Boyce 1957: 10, 18, 36–37; Boyce 1983: 1158–59; Boyce 2002. Other scholars have accepted the idea that *Vis and Ramin* is Parthian in origin, though to varying degrees: see Meisami 1987: 22 n.44; Davis 2005; Pourshariati 2010: 373; Shayegan 2016: 34; de Jong 2017b: 88; Cross 2018: xxviii; Silverstein 2018: 119 n.90; Sadeghi 2018: 41; Gregoratti 2023: 400–1; Cross 2023: 5 n.3.

162. Gorgani, *Vis u Ramin* = Todua and Gwakharia 1970: 48–50. For English translations of the poem, see Morrison 1972; Davis 2008.

163. For this argument as applied to *Vis and Ramin*, see Southgate 1985: 20 (who details the poem’s other divergences from Islamic mores, as well); Davis 2008: xii–xiv. On *xwēdōdah* in pre-Islamic Iran generally, see above, n.47.

164. Gorgani, *Vis u Ramin* = Todua and Gwakharia 1970: 43, lines 17–18. On the geographical referent of Khuzan, see Cross 2015: 187–88 n.112; Silverstein 2018: 119 n.91.



poem is called the *dāyagān* or (more often) the *dāyeh*.<sup>165</sup> Her role as fosterer is a cliental one, for although she is a woman of great wealth and means, she nonetheless “inhabits a decidedly inferior social rank in comparison to the other actors in the story,” as Cameron Cross puts it.<sup>166</sup> Moreover, the nurse’s facilitation of the love between her two foster-children is a matter of not only romance, but also political sedition. Her loyalties and allegiances vacillate throughout the poem, but in the end she urges Vis and Ramin to overthrow the reigning king and claim his throne, which they do.<sup>167</sup> However powerful and rich she may have been at the beginning of the work, by its conclusion she has maneuvered her foster-son onto the throne of the king of kings, with her foster-daughter by his side. The nurse does not command armies like Ṛaham or Monzer, but she resembles these aristocrats in her use of cliental fosterage to secure political advancement.

#### HOSTAGESHIP AND FOSTERAGE: A PRAGMATIC MISUNDERSTANDING

The evidence for political fosterage in the ancient Near East is necessarily diverse and multifaceted, reflecting as it does the course of many centuries and the tenure of various imperial powers in Anatolia, Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the Iranian plateau. The sources suggest that pro-parentage could have different valences among different populations at different points in time—and all the more so in the high-stakes realm of interstate relations, where transfers of royal children cut across political and cultural boundaries. Does the diversity of the evidence preclude a schematic reconstruction, or is there a recognizable pattern to how fosterage worked?

The general trend appears to be a shift from patronal to cliental models over time, even if the former never disappeared. When the pharaohs of Egypt and the kings of Assyria emphasized their pro-paternal roles in the upbringing of foreign dynasts, it was to highlight their suzerainty over the lands from which these children came. When the pharaoh wanted to mount a claim to a non-Egyptian territory, he brought up its royalty in his nursery. The same was true in Assyria, where Babylonian and Arab dynasts might grow up at the king’s court. The rulers did the raising. The boasts of the kings about the extent of their power could be ideological statements rather than accurate descriptions of political reality, of course. All the same, they reflect the dominant paradigm of elite fosterage within Egyptian and Mesopotamian societies.

165. Todua and Gwakharia 1970: 44, lines 49–51.

166. Quotation: Cross 2015: 208; cf. Cross 2023: 91 n.54. For the Nurse’s wealth, see Todua and Gwakharia 1970: 43, lines 19–23; 46, lines 11–13; 100, line 17. In the Georgian translation of *Vis and Ramin*, the Nurse is explicitly called “a nurse of good birth” (trans. Wardrop 1914: 9).

167. Todua and Gwakharia 1970: 498–99, lines 26–58.



Beginning in the Hellenistic period, however, a shift to cliental fosterage begins to emerge in the evidence. The courts of the Argead, Seleucid, Antigonid, and Ptolemaic dynasties hosted a range of noble, foreign, and otherwise elite children, but the fosterer of these youths was usually not the king himself. The sources show that this role more often went to dignitaries of various stripes who, while politically influential, were not royalty. A similar pattern is evident in the epigraphic record from the Parthian empire itself, thin though it may be. Anagranes's fosterage of Dracontis seems to have shaped relations between Iberia and Arsacid Armenia, but Anagranes was not a king. From Parthian Hatra and its adjacent territories, inscriptions commemorate people who fostered kings, but not kings who fostered.

The late antique and early Islamic evidence for cliental fosterage from Arsacid Armenia and Sasanian Persia is more ample, even if there are indications that patronal fosterage was in operation as well. Late antique Armenian historiography, Sasanian epigraphy, and New Persian literature show a fosterage landscape where royalty from the Arsacid and Sasanian dynasties were sent to noble families to be raised. These families were influential in their own right, to be sure, and the ruling house needed their support to maintain its grip on power. But they were still notional subordinates, and fosterage offered them a chance to cultivate a close relationship with a dynast who might one day become king or queen. The picture is complicated somewhat by the testimony of the *Kārnāmag*, which despite its composition date might reflect a late Sasanian practice that saw noble children leave their parents to grow up at the court of the king of kings. In that case, however, it is striking that such patronal fosterage is unattested in Sasanian royal inscriptions, whereas cliental fosterage is.

Since fosterage was the lens through which the Arsacid kings and their Parthian subjects would have seen the Arsacids of Rome, how can this view be squared with hostageship, the concept at the center of virtually all Roman discussions of these figures? If the dominant fosterage paradigm in Arsacid Iran was indeed the cliental one, then the entire enterprise would have run on a fortuitous and mutually profitable misunderstanding. The Romans considered hostage submission to be the obligation of a subordinate, so when they saw Arsacid "hostages" arriving in their city, the power of Rome over its eastern rival seemed to be confirmed. The Parthians, for their part, viewed the fosterage of royal children as the obligation of a subordinate. In their eyes, the Arsacid king's dispatch of his family members to Rome would have been a sign not of weakness, but of strength. Despite or perhaps even *because* of their divergent interpretations of what these exchanges meant, the Parthians and Romans enjoyed a fruitful miscommunication that left each side convinced of its dominance over the other.

The privileging of Near Eastern evidence for the study of these exchanges, at any rate, shows that Parthian historians have neglected fosterage by allowing

Roman authors to prefigure modern scholarly discussions as debates around hostageship. The sources closest to the world of the Arsacids suggest that kinship and pro-parentage were at the center of the Parthian frame of reference. From this vantage point, the emperor's court was not a place of confinement for the Arsacids of Rome, but rather their nursery. The emperor himself was not a captor. He was kin.