

## Reception

### *The Arsacids at Rome*

What did the Romans make of the Arsacids who arrived in their city? How did they understand who these figures were, and how could their residence in Italy be explained? In this chapter, I argue that two paradigms shaped Rome's view of its Arsacid residents. The dominant one was a tradition of hostageship that construed the Arsacids of Rome as tokens of Roman supremacy over the Parthian empire. The second, less prevalent one—abstruse but still detectable in the evidence—was patronal fosterage. Previous scholarship has sketched the outlines of these paradigms, but the relationship between them has yet to be clarified, and no treatment has comprehensively integrated the sources for the Arsacids of Rome. I survey the full range of Roman views here to describe the Roman side of pragmatic misunderstanding with Parthia: the Arsacids buttressed Roman pretensions to world rule first and foremost as hostages, but also as foster-children.

The imperialist dimension of hostage taking in Roman political culture is well established, and several scholars have demonstrated that Romans of the early principate saw Arsacid “hostages” as proof of Parthian inferiority. Josef Wiesehöfer has shown how the reception of Arsacid dynasts was collocated with Parthia's return of the standards in 19 B.C.E. to establish “the irreversible division of roles between Roman masters and Parthian servants.”<sup>1</sup> In a similar vein, Elisabeth Nedergaard writes that “Augustus presented the [Arsacid] princes as proof of what he called a relation of ‘*amicitia*’ between Rome and Parthia. It is evident from his words that this relation was not an equal one.”<sup>2</sup> Such interpretations have made valuable

1. Wiesehöfer 2010: 189: “die unumkehrbare Rollenverteilung zwischen römischen Herren und parthischen Dienern.”

2. Nedergaard 1988: 111.

contributions to the historiographical rehabilitation of the Parthian empire, since they show that Arsacid inferiority was a construction of the Roman sources rather than an objective political fact.<sup>3</sup>

As far as hostageship is concerned, however, no single treatment has traced the entire Julio-Claudian arc of what I will here call “Arsacid exhibition,” by which I mean the repeated, quasi-triumphal practice of displaying Arsacid dynasts to Italian audiences as symbols of Rome’s ascendancy over Parthia. Three such events under Augustus, Caligula, and Nero shaped the place of Parthia in the Roman worldview and impressed upon the emperor’s subjects how the Arsacids were to be regarded. The enormous public profile of these exhibitions explains why hostageship, not fosterage, was the primary classification assigned to the Arsacids of Rome. It was through spectacle that most Romans were introduced to their city’s Arsacid residents, and the jingoistic nature of such displays helped cement the designation of the Arsacids in the extant Roman literary sources as *obsides* in Latin or *homēroi* in Greek.

In addition to the dominant discourse of hostageship, some sources also adumbrate an understanding of the Arsacids of Rome as Julio-Claudian kin, and a few commentators have touched on this dimension as well. Taking their cues from a surge of research on the Roman family and especially on the *domus* or *familia Augusta*, these scholars argue that the subordination of Roman imperial machinery to the structures of the Julio-Claudian family extended to the Arsacids, who were placed under the “parentage” of the Roman emperor—a form of “personal international relations,” in Beth Severy’s words.<sup>4</sup> Meret Strothmann is explicit: “with their reception, the sons of the Parthians became members of the *familia Caesaris*.”<sup>5</sup> Ann Kuttner reaches the important conclusion that fosterage and kinship could coexist with the more belligerent dimensions of hostageship. As she puts it, the Arsacids could be “welcomed into the imperial *domus*” and at the same time “displayed as emblems of Roman triumph and superiority”—a reception that could even be accompanied by a simultaneous effort to give them “open honor.”<sup>6</sup> Other historians have discussed the Arsacids alongside dynasts from Rome’s provincial or “client” kingdoms who also had a familial relationship with the emperor.<sup>7</sup>

But while the literature on the early Principate as an imperial household has brought the familial aspect of Julio-Claudian politics into clearer focus, the paternal nature of Roman fosterage has yet to be fully reconstructed, and perhaps more importantly, it has never been contrasted with the cliental form of the practice

3. On these lines see also Ziegler 1964: 52; Dąbrowa 1987: 63; Strothmann 2012: 91; Gregoratti 2015: 732; Gregoratti 2020: 82.

4. Severy 2003: 150.

5. Strothmann 2012: 96: “Mit ihrer Aufnahme werden die Söhne der Parther Mitglieder der *familia Caesaris*.”

6. Kuttner 1995: 112–13.

7. See Allen 2006: 135–36; Kleiner and Buxton 2008: 59–60.

on the Parthian side. Key pieces of Roman evidence have more to say on Arsacid-Caesarian kinship than previous discussions have made clear, and passages from the *Res Gestae*, Ovid, and Tacitus will be examined here with this issue in mind. The chief shortcoming of previous discussions, however, is the failure to put Roman ideas in dialogue with a Parthian view that has been independently reconstructed on the basis of Near Eastern sources. Where the last chapters concluded that cliental fosterage was the primary framework in Arsacid Iran, this one shows that—to the limited degree that the fosterage paradigm gained purchase in Rome—the operative Roman model was patronal. Whether through hostageship or fosterage, then, misunderstanding reigned, and the Romans, like the Parthians, could see the Arsacids of Rome as a sign of their own supremacy.

#### ARSACID EXHIBITION

The majority of the Roman sources for the Arsacids in Italy are the productions of emperors and lettered elites, and they equate Arsacid residence in Rome with Parthian submission. While Augustus's reference to his possession of Arsacid "pledges" (*pignora*) is a more complex statement than is usually acknowledged, Nedergaard and others have rightly shown how the passage claims the higher ground in an unequal Roman-Parthian relationship.<sup>8</sup> Moreover, the literary sources that constitute the bulk of the direct evidence for the Arsacids of Rome suggest that Roman elites may have been even more triumphalist than the emperors themselves. Velleius's contention that Frahād IV sent his children to Rome "in fear of the reputation of such a great name [i.e. Caesar]" is one case where an Augustan author goes even farther than Augustus himself in the chest-thumping ascription of supremacy to an Arsacid hostage taker.<sup>9</sup> Suetonius offers a similar assessment, for he mentions the sons of Frahād as one of several signs that the Parthians "yielded" to the emperor.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the widespread adoption of this view by later Roman authors like Festus, Justin, and Orosius shows that it predominated in Roman historical memories of the Arsacids.<sup>11</sup>

As previously discussed, a different set of authors did not attribute Arsacid "hostage" submission to fear, or not solely to fear, but their testimony does not overturn the proposition that the Arsacids were, in the eyes of most Romans, Caesarian trophies from a Parthian victory. Strabo's discussion of Parthian internal politics as the impetus for hostage submission coexists with a different passage in his work where the geographer speaks of Parthian obsequiousness and Roman

8. *Mon. Anc.* 32.2; but on a possible invocation of kinship in this passage, see below. Statement of unequal relations: Nedergaard 1988: 111; cf. Drijvers 1998: 290; Master 2016: 96; Olbrycht 2018: 391; Gregoratti 2020: 82; Álvarez-Pedrosa 2022: 109.

9. Vell. Pat. 2.94.4.

10. Suet. *Aug.* 21.3.

11. Just. 42.5.11–12; Fest. *Brev.* 19.4; [Aurel. Vict.] *Epit.* 1.8; Oros. 6.21.29; Eutrop. *Brev.* 7.9.

preeminence.<sup>12</sup> Modern scholars may see a contradiction, but Strabo evidently did not. To his mind, domestic motives must have been compatible with a readiness to appease Rome.<sup>13</sup> The same can be said of Josephus. In his account, hostage submission is purely a result of conditions at the Arsacid court, and interstate relations with Rome do not factor into his explanation at all.<sup>14</sup> Yet he, too, imagines the Parthians furious at the degrading nature of the practice, since the transaction relegated their empire to an inferior position.<sup>15</sup> Consideration of Parthian motives did not deter Roman authors from interpreting Arsacid hostageship as a sign of Rome's superiority.

The exception is Tacitus, but his divergence on this point should be read as pushback against the mainstream imperial chauvinism of his peers. Frahād IV, Tacitus says, was motivated "not so much by fear of us [the Romans] as by mistrust of his countrymen," and later Walgaš I sent Arsacids "in order to prepare war from an advantageous position—or to remove those suspected of rivalry through a nominal hostage submission."<sup>16</sup> Both statements trade on a prevailing Roman belief that the surrender of *obsides* is tantamount to political subjection. Tacitus anticipates that the reader will automatically supply fear of Rome as the Parthian motive, and his sentence undercuts the assumption. As scholars have shown, Tacitean historiography routinely challenges such blithe overconfidence in Roman imperialism, and while it may go too far to call this a programmatic objective, it is at least a recurring theme in his work.<sup>17</sup> Tacitus does indeed push back against the notion that the Arsacids of Rome were trophies, then, but his stance is that of a contrarian attacking what is otherwise a widespread presumption.

If emperors and lettered elites held Rome's Arsacids to be tokens of eastern victory, at least for the most part, what about the rest of Roman society? The evidence furnishes only a tenuous basis for the investigation of this topic, but one approach is to look at the spectacles where the Arsacids were marketed to mass audiences. These exhibitions have been studied individually, but they represent a consistent practice that ran from Augustus through Nero. For as long as Arsacids arrived in Rome, they were displayed to the public in elaborate, choreographed ceremonies. Individual responses are irrecoverable, but it is possible to speak about the precedents of such events, their place in the public fashioning of Roman imperialism, and the spirit in which they were celebrated.

What emerges is a tradition of Arsacid exhibition that evolved from the Republican triumphal display of foreign dignitaries to assert and celebrate Roman suzerainty over distant regions. This is not to say that the events themselves were

12. Strab. 16.1.28 (Parthian domestic politics); 6.4.2 (Roman dominance).

13. E.g. Drijvers 1998: 289; Olbrycht 2018: 392–94.

14. Joseph. *AJ* 18.41–42.

15. Joseph. *AJ* 18.47.

16. Tac. *Ann.* 2.1.2, 13.9.1.

17. Syme 1958: 529–30; Allen 2006: 224–26; Adler 2011: 136–39.

formal triumphs by the criteria of the late republic. They were not, especially given the ritual's shifting boundaries during the transition from republic to empire.<sup>18</sup> But Arsacid exhibition took its cues from the assertion of conquest that the triumph represented, and the carefully stage-managed presentation of "barbarian" royalty was a practice whose historical antecedents lay in the parades of the late republic. So while the Julio-Claudian emperors never sent an army into Parthia, to say nothing of actually conquering it, they did not need to, in a sense. The Arsacids of Rome gave them the tools to achieve emblematic domination of their eastern neighbors, which, in view of the risks and costs of military expeditions and direct administration, might even have been preferable to the genuine article.<sup>19</sup>

In their efforts to stage the subjugation of Parthia, the Julio-Claudians could draw on republican precedents, but with the creative license that came from the confinement of the triumph to members of their family alone. The employment of hostages and prisoners has been well treated by a profusion of recent studies on the triumph, which have clarified the role of captive bodies in heightening the theatrical impact of the procession.<sup>20</sup> In two republican cases, the sources designate certain participants as hostages.<sup>21</sup> But these figures are mentioned in the same breath as other captive royalty, and the distinction between hostage and prisoner seems to have been subject to elision, both for spectators who attended the events and the authors who wrote about them later.<sup>22</sup> What mattered was the social rank of the coerced foreign dignitary, and the higher, the better. That principle remained in effect even as the ritual was otherwise transformed in the late republic and early empire. Augustus and his successors exploited their opportunities to exhibit high-status foreigners in triumphs and related public spectacles—and the Arsacids of Rome were among their most prominent showpieces. Three episodes show the Julio-Claudian emperors drawing on republican triumphal precedents with their Arsacids as the main attractions.

The first Roman exhibition of Arsacid dynasts was organized by Augustus. The date is not specified, but it was probably not long after the first coordinated transfer

18. On changes to the triumph during the late republic, see Lange 2016b: 71–94. On the changes under Augustus and the later Julio-Claudians, see Itgenshorst 2008; Itgenshorst 2016; Goldbeck 2016.

19. When territory across the Euphrates was later annexed under Septimius Severus, for instance, Cassius Dio (75.3.3) complained that it brought nothing except "continuous wars and enormous expenditures."

20. See esp. Allen 2006: 97–101; Beard 2007: 107–42; Östenberg 2009: 128–67. Additional recent works on the triumph include Itgenshorst 2005; Krasser et al. 2008; Pittenger 2009; Goldbeck and Wienand 2016. Versnel 1970 remains foundational.

21. Hostages in the triumph of Quinctius Flamininus in 193 B.C.E.: Liv. 34.52.9; Eutrop. 4.2.3; Oros. 4.20.2. Pompey's in 61 B.C.E.: Plut. *Pomp.* 45.4; App. *Mith.* 117. The Iberian hostages who marched in Pompey's triumph were likely the children of the Iberian king Art(h)oces: Flor. 1.40.28; Cass. Dio 37.2.7.

22. Östenberg 2009: 166–67.

under Frahād IV in 19–9 B.C.E.<sup>23</sup> The occasion is described only by Suetonius, who includes it in a section on Augustan spectacles that took various forms and featured diverse participants:<sup>24</sup>

Ad scaenicas quoque et gladiatorias operas et equitibus Romanis aliquando usus est, verum prius quam senatus consulto interdiceretur. Postea nihil sane praeterquam adulescentulum Lycium honeste natum exhibuit, tantum ut ostenderet, quod erat bipedali minor, librarum septemdecim ac vocis immensae. Quodam autem muneris die Parthorum obsides tunc primum missos per mediam harenam ad spectaculum induxit superque se subsellio secundo collocavit. Solebat etiam citra spectaculorum dies, si quando quid invisitatum dignumque cognitu advectum esset, id extra ordinem quolibet loco publicare, ut rhinocerotem apud Saepta, tigrim in scaena, anguem quinquaginta cubitorum pro Comitio.

[Augustus] used to sometimes employ even Roman knights at theatrical or gladiatorial games, but before this was forbidden by a decree of the Senate. After that he exhibited no one of respectable parentage except for a certain young man named Lycius, and him only as a curiosity, because he was less than two feet tall, weighed seventeen pounds, and had a stentorian voice. But on the day of one of his festivals he led the first Parthian hostages to have been sent [to Rome] through the middle of the arena and sat them above him in the second row. Moreover, scheduled performances aside, it was his habit to put on special exhibitions in any convenient place if something novel and worth knowing about had been brought in—for instance a rhinoceros in the Saepta, a tiger on stage, and a snake of 50 cubits in front of the Comitium.

What is most striking about the inclusion of the Arsacids in this passage is that they were ostensibly on hand to watch a spectacle, not to be the subject of one. They joined the emperor in the audience, after all, and in formal terms the show would have begun only after that point. But Suetonius does not describe the content of this spectacle, and the omission suggests that the Parthians themselves became the main attractions. Public interest was no doubt stimulated by the manner of their introduction: Augustus marched them through the middle of the display ground in what could only have been the most ostentatious possible path to their seats. While the Arsacids of Rome were not performers in the same way that actors or gladiators were, then, their function at this spectacle was nevertheless to be viewed rather than to view.

Suetonius's testimony also illustrates how, like many royal hostages of the republican period, the Arsacids were treated both as dignitaries and as exotic curiosities.

23. Sonnabend 1986: 256 and Wiesehöfer 2010: 188 and n.10 connect the Suetonius passage with the Arsacid child that came into Augustus's custody during the Tirdād episode (see table 1 for sources) rather than the 19–9 B.C.E. transfer under Frahād IV. But Suetonius speaks of a group in the plural, which cannot be a reference to the young prince who accompanied Tirdād; cf. Louis 2010: 349–50; Wardle 2014: 328–29; Schlude 2020: 98.

24. Suet. *Aug.* 43.3–4.

The *autem* that begins the operative sentence in Suetonius acknowledges the royal heritage of the hostages. As with Lycius, the text presents the Arsacids as exceptions to the rule that elites should not participate in spectacles.<sup>25</sup> But the author concludes the passage with a list of fantastical creatures that Augustus produced for the entertainment of the Roman people: a rhinoceros, a tiger, and a giant snake. Such creatures were still novelties, but Roman audiences had long been accustomed to the exhibition of animals that represented newly conquered territories.<sup>26</sup> The proximity of the Arsacids to these exotic curiosities in Suetonius's text is no accident. Just as the display of a tiger on a Roman stage showed the long reach of the emperor's arm into the remote east, so too the parading of Parthian royalty furnished a potent symbol of control over a land freshly reconfigured as the *alter orbis*, the "other world."<sup>27</sup>

The employment of spectacles to articulate Parthia's relationship to Rome would later continue with perhaps the most grandiose public display of Augustus's reign: the Salaminian *naumachia* ("sea battle") of 2 B.C.E. Held in the heart of the city near the Tiber island, the massive display involved the excavation of a pit some 500 by 350 meters in area, with thirty ships and over three thousand men (not counting the rowers) participating as combatants—at least according to Augustus, who thought the event important enough to include in his *Res Gestae*.<sup>28</sup> Dio is the only historian to mention the assigned identities of the competing sides, whom he calls "Persians and Athenians."<sup>29</sup> Those designations are supported by Ovid, a contemporary who probably attended the event himself. He describes a spectacle of "Persian and Cecropian ships"; the latter term is a reference to Cecrops, the mythical king of Athens.<sup>30</sup> The "Athenians" won.<sup>31</sup> The details sufficiently establish that Augustus had reenacted the battle of Salamis, originally fought in 480 B.C.E. between an Athenian-led Greek fleet and the Persian armada of the Achaemenid king Xerxes. In front of one of the largest crowds ever assembled for a Roman spectacle, the emperor chose to present a bygone triumph of Greece over Persia from an era when Rome had yet to arrive as an imperial power.

25. On late republican / early imperial interdictions against senatorial and equestrian participation in public spectacles, see Louis 2010: 348–49; Wardle 2014: 324–29, with consideration of Lycius's status and origin at 328.

26. Östenberg 2009: 168–84; cf. Beard 2007: 321; Östenberg 2014.

27. On the connection between tigers and Indian embassies, see Cass. Dio 54.9.8; Strab. 15.1.73; Flor. *Epit.* 2.34.62–63. On Parthia as *alter orbis*, see Sonnabend 1986; Shayegan 2011: 334–35; Nabel 2019b: 336.

28. *Mon. Anc.* 23. The other ancient sources include Vell. Pat. 2.100.2; Suet. *Aug.* 43; Tac. *Ann.* 12.56.1, 14.15.2; Cass. Dio 55.10.7–8, 66.25.3; Front. *Aq.* 1.22.

29. Cass. Dio 55.10.7–8.

30. Ov. *Ars Am.* 1.171–72; discussion in Hollis 1977: 64; Bowersock 1984: 175.

31. On whether the outcome was incidental or planned, see Coleman 1990: 71; Coleman 1993: 69; Wardle 2014: 324.

To what end? While the east-west opposition of the *naumachia* might have evoked Augustus's defeat of Antony and Cleopatra at Actium, the outcome of Salamis was also pressed into service as a frame for Roman-Parthian relations.<sup>32</sup> Three features linked the display to contemporary eastern affairs. First, the show was staged in connection with the dedication of the temple of Mars Ultor, a structure that Augustus explicitly associated with the restoration of Rome's standards and prisoners by Frahād IV.<sup>33</sup> Second, the emperor's adopted son Gaius Caesar was about to depart for Parthia in order to settle the dispute that had arisen over Frahātak's activity in Armenia.<sup>34</sup> Third and most importantly, the Arsacids had been conflated with the Achaemenids in Roman thinking about the Parthian east. The "Persians" who went down in defeat at this reenactment could therefore be understood as the direct predecessors of the Parthian empire. By extension, the Roman audience was invited to identify with the Athenians and their Greek allies.<sup>35</sup> The effect of the *naumachia*, then, was to graft Roman-Parthian relations onto a deeply rooted civilizational struggle between the Mediterranean and Persia.

Spectacles, then, were one place where Rome's relationship to Parthia was presented for public consumption, stage-managed for proper effect, and infused with world-historical meaning, and the appearance of the Arsacids in the arena was no exception. Augustus's exhibition of these recent Parthian arrivals—ostensibly as audience members, but in fact as showpieces—was proof in the flesh that the east had been tamed. Like rhinoceroses and tigers brought from afar, the appearance of the Arsacids within a Roman spectacular framework furnished a potent demonstration of the emperor's power to superintend the kingdom that their family ruled. Parallels to earlier displays of "hostages" in Roman triumphs would have been easy to draw, and just as in the republican period, the bodies of those from the fringes of Roman power would have been among the most useful props in the performance of empire without end.

The arrival of the Arsacids at Rome coincided with the proliferation of visual media that represented Parthians, and the submissive overtones of hostageship neatly dovetailed with the iconography of subjugation that some—though not all—of these works employed. As a ruler who harnessed "the power of images," Augustus was quick to promote his management of the Parthian east in art.<sup>36</sup> Perhaps the most widely disseminated image of a Parthian circulated on the emperor's coins heralding the return of the standards in 19 B.C.E.—an event in political history that featured on more coin types than any other Augustan campaign.<sup>37</sup>

32. Swan 2004: 100–1 mentions the echo of Actium that the event might have provided.

33. For the connection with the *naumachia*, see Vell. Pat. 2.100.2; Cass. Dio 55.10.6–9.

34. On this campaign, see Luther 2010; Schlude 2020: 102–4.

35. Syme 1984: 922; Bowersock 1984: 175; Spawforth 1994: 238–42; Sumi 2005: 267–68; Lerouge 2007: 125; Hardie 2007: 129–30; Shayegan 2011: 338–40.

36. Quotation from Zanker 1988.

37. Rose 2005: 23. On the numismatic evidence generally, see Van der Vin 1981.





FIGURE 2. Denarius of Augustus, 19 B.C.E.–4 B.C.E. The obverse shows the deity Feronia. On the reverse, a kneeling Parthian proffers a Roman standard. *RIC* 1 no. 288. Photo credit: American Numismatic Society (ANS 1944.100.24299).

These issues depicted a kneeling Parthian submissively handing over a Roman standard, drawing on the posture of subjugated barbarians from the visual language of the late republic (figure 2).<sup>38</sup> Moreover, a triumphal arch in the Forum showed Augustus riding a quadriga and flanked by Parthians, who stood on a level below his own.<sup>39</sup> One of them—this time standing in “heroic diagonal” rather than kneeling—proffered a standard to the emperor.<sup>40</sup> The image of the Parthian subordinate was taken up in other works of art from the Augustan period. Fragments of three statues of a visually similar type (the so-called “kneeling barbarians/Oriental”) have been dated to the late first century B.C.E. (figure 3). They may have originally been part of a single monument, supporting a bronze tripod dedicated by Augustus to commemorate his “defeat” of the Arsacid kingdom.<sup>41</sup> The image is found in other visual media, as well. Glass gems dating to the Augustan period and produced on a large scale show two kneeling Parthians offering up standards to the goddess Victory, who advances Roman claims to world rule by standing atop a globe.<sup>42</sup> The Homeric scene on one of the Hoby cups showing

38. E.g. *RIC* 1 no. 287–88 (Sutherland and Carson 1984: 62).

39. The arch does not survive, but can be reconstructed on the basis of literary, numismatic, and archaeological evidence; see Rose 2005: 28 n.41 for literature. For the literary evidence, see Cass. Dio 54.8.3; Schol. Veron. in Verg. *Aen.* 7.605 with Rich 1998: 98. Depictions on coins: *RIC* 1 no. 508 (Sutherland and Carson 1984: 82, from Pergamon, 19/18 B.C.E.); *RIC* 1 no. 131 (Sutherland and Carson 1984: 50, from Spain, 18/17 B.C.E.); *RIC* 1 no. 359 (Sutherland and Carson 1984: 68, from Rome, 16 B.C.E.).

40. On the posture of the Parthians on the arch, contrast Rose 2005: 33 with Osgood 2018: 209.

41. Schneider 1986: 18–97; Schneider 2007: 71–72. But cf. the skepticism of Rose 2005: 24 n.22 on this point.

42. Maderna-Lauter 1988: 459, 470–71 (no. 264); Schneider 2007: 61.



FIGURE 3. Colossal statue of a kneeling Parthian from Rome, first century B.C.E. with later reconstructions (Copenhagen Glyptotek). The platform held up by his right arm originally supported a larger structure. This image is a derivative of *Kneeling Barbarian* by Wikimedia Commons user Richard Mortel, used under CC BY 2.0 DEED. This work is licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0 by the author.

Priam's supplication of Achilles probably evoked Parthian affairs, as well; given his Parthian dress, Priam might have been seen as an Arsacid submitting to his counterpart Augustus/Achilles (figure 4).<sup>43</sup> These works were not all commissioned or created by the Augustan regime, of course. Collectively, however, they reflect the triumphalism over Parthia that the emperor espoused and promoted. These abject figures in trousers, tunics, and Phrygian caps would have sent a clear

43. Vermeule 1968: 125; Dowling 2006: 144–45 and n.45.



FIGURE 4. Roman silver cup showing Priam and Achilles. Made and signed by Cheirisophos and found in Hoby, Denmark (c. 30 B.C.E.–40 C.E.). Photo credit: National Museum of Denmark.

message: Parthia might be a world apart from the Mediterranean, but it had been humbled by Roman power all the same.

Roman viewers may or may not have immediately associated such figures with royal hostages, but the exhibition of the Arsacids of Rome would have worked in tandem with these visual media to create the impression of Arsacid subordination. Attempts to identify Parthians in Augustan art with specific historical figures have proven contentious. The Parthian figure on the breastplate of the *Primaporta* Augustus, for instance, has variously been interpreted as Frahād IV, one of his children, a Zoroastrian deity, or simply a generalized Parthian (figure 5).<sup>44</sup> Definitive identifications exclusive of other possibilities are hard to maintain, and it is best to assume a range of understandings among contemporary viewers. Even so, the Arsacids of the imperial court are likely to have been the only Parthians that most Romans ever saw in person. Arsacid “hostages” provided flesh and blood referents for the beaten, cowering easterners that featured so prominently in the visual media of the age. As the emperor crafted an image of Roman ascendancy over the Parthian kingdom, he put the Arsacids of Rome at the center of the frame.

What did Frahād’s offspring make of their own display? The available evidence affords minimal insight, but one inscription presents a contrast with the Roman

44. See the various identifications in Kähler 1959: 16; Bastet 1966: 80; Jucker 1977; Van der Vin 1981: 120–21; Zanker 1988: 188–92; Simon 1991: 207–16; Schneider 1998: 97–99; Schäfer 1998: 84–92; Kuttner 1999: 117–18; Rose 2005: 24–28; Pollini 2012: 187. The identifications in older studies are tabulated in Jucker 1977: 37.





FIGURE 5. Parthian and Roman figures on the breastplate of the Prima Porta Augustus. This image is a derivative of *Augusto di Prima Porta* by Wikimedia Commons user Sailko, used under CC BY-SA 3.0 DEED. This work is licensed under CC BY-SA 4.0 by the author.

ideology crafted through Arsacid exhibition. It is an epitaph in Latin found on the Via Flaminia at Rome that marked the tomb, now lost, of Seraspadanes and Rhodaspes. Presumably composed by the remaining Arsacids of Rome, the short text describes each brother as a “son of Frahād [IV] Arsaces, king of kings; a Parthian.”<sup>45</sup> Neither hostageship nor fosterage figures in the epitaph. What matters instead is the royal titulature of the Arsacid kingship. As Parthian coinage and other internal sources show, “king of kings” was a traditional expression of world rule in Arsacid ideology, articulating a political vision in which various far-flung kingdoms were united under the Arsacid banner.<sup>46</sup> If Augustus’s display of Arsacid “hostages” was a sign of his supremacy over Parthia, then, the invocation of Frahād IV in the epitaph of Seraspadanes and Rhodaspes told a different story. The Arsacids who composed this text described their ancestral king with a title that expressly proclaimed him to be a ruler without peer.

The absence of the word hostage from the stone is also significant, because other foreigners did include that label on their funerary monuments. A Parthian example survives in the Latin epitaph of a woman named Ulpia Axse, identified in the text as a “hostage of the Parthians.” Axse is otherwise unknown, but onomastics suggest Iranian heritage and the acquisition of a husband during her life at Rome.<sup>47</sup> Most scholars date the inscription to the second century C.E., when Rome launched several invasions of Parthian territory, and Axse’s hostageship may have begun during one of those campaigns.<sup>48</sup> She and her family saw fit to include her hostage status on her funerary monument; they must have considered it central to her identity. The same can be said for Sitalces, a Thracian who lived during the reign of Augustus. His epitaph, shared with his sister Julia Phyllis, specifies that he was a hostage.<sup>49</sup> Self-designation as a hostage is rare on funerary texts, to be sure. But the option was available, and at least two hostages took it. Seraspadanes and Rhodaspes did not, despite the premium that the Augustan regime placed on their supposed hostageship. Instead, they chose to memorialize the supreme status of their father.

Of course, even an Arsacid expression of supremacy could be coopted in a Roman imperial landscape. The convex surface of Seraspadanes and Rhodaspes’s epitaph suggests that it belonged to a circular tomb, a form employed by many Romans during the late republic and early empire, including Augustus himself. The monument may have been located in a section of the Via Flaminia that hosted

45. *CIL* 6.1799 = *ILS* 842 = Hackl et al. 2010: 2.436; cf. Strab. 16.1.28.

46. On “king of kings” as an Arsacid title, see Shayegan 2011: 41–247.

47. *AE* 1979: 78: *opes* [an alternate orthography for *obses*] *Parthorum*. On the onomastics, see Chaumont 2002.

48. Likely second century C.E. date: Priuli 1977: 332–33; Ricci 1996: 576–78; Chaumont 2002; Álvarez Pérez-Sostoa 2010: 173.

49. *CIL* 6.26608 = *ILS* 846.

the tombs of several foreign kings.<sup>50</sup> The structure could thus be interpreted as proof of the cosmopolitan character of Rome's empire: if even the princes of Parthia were living and dying in the city, adopting Latin, and erecting tombs in local fashion, was there any corner of the world that could escape the centripetal force of Roman power? The dynasts of a fearsome and remote foreign empire whose ruler styled himself a king of kings now reposed along a Roman road, perhaps gathered in assemblage with other deceased foreign potentates, a testament to the center of gravity in world politics. There is no evidence that Augustus or his successors explicitly instrumentalized the tombs of the Arsacids of Rome in this manner. But the framing of Arsacid exhibition may have meant that they did not need to, since the emperor had taught his subjects to regard the Arsacid presence in the city as a token of Parthia's submission. The funerary monuments of the Arsacids of Rome would have continued to underline this point even after their deaths.

The second major display of Arsacids was mounted by Caligula as part of his infamous bridge procession on the Bay of Naples in 39 C.E.<sup>51</sup> Over the course of two days, the emperor paraded with great fanfare across a three-mile-long pontoon that ran from Baiae to Puteoli.<sup>52</sup> The elusive meaning of the Baiae spectacle has fueled debate. What did Caligula mean to do, and how did his contemporaries understand the proceedings? The ancient sources offer various explanations for Caligula's construction of the bridge.<sup>53</sup> For their part, modern commentators have connected the affair to several aspects of Caligula's principate, including the abortive British and German campaigns, the relationship between the emperor and the senatorial aristocracy, and, of course, the emperor's personal psychology and alleged madness.<sup>54</sup>

But while divergent scholarly assessments have clarified many features of this abstruse display, there are good reasons to understand the Baiae procession as a reassertion of Julio-Claudian mastery over the Parthian east through the exhibition of an Arsacid "hostage." The Parthian dimension of the spectacle has not escaped notice, and Donna Hurley has made the case that the show constituted a "surrogate triumph over the East."<sup>55</sup> But the importance of Rome's newest Arsacid arrival to the episode has not been sufficiently acknowledged or contextualized.

50. Ricci 1996: 569; Álvarez-Pedrosa 2022: 111. On circular tombs, see Davies 2000: 13–19; Davies 2010: 227–28.

51. For the date, see Wardle 2007.

52. On the geographical termini of the pontoon, see Wardle 1994: 189.

53. Sen. *De Brev. Vit.* 18.5; Joseph. *AJ* 19.6; Suet. *Cal.* 19.3; Cass. Dio 59.17.1; [Aurel. Vict.] *Epit.* 3.9.

54. Scholarly discussions of Baiae with respect to the army and Caligula's British and German campaigns: Kleijwegt 1994: 664; Winterling 2011: 129–30. Slight to senatorial aristocracy: Winterling 2011: 131. Demonstration of manhood: Barrett 1989: 212. The literature on the question of Caligula's madness is large; see Winterling 2009: 103–19, with references.

55. Hurley 1993: 73–74. Balsdon 1934: 53 made much of Dārāw's participation, but held that Caligula's intention was to impress the Parthian visitor, not his Italian audience; cf. Maurer 1949: 100.

Caligula's exhibition of this dynast followed closely on the example that Augustus had set, and the episode shows the development of a tradition as much as it does the emperor's eccentricities.

The newest Arsacid to join the group in Rome was Dārāw (Darius in Latin), the son of Ardawān II, and like the children of Frahād IV, he was trotted out as a prize of conquest. Although the chronology is disputed, Dārāw had been handed over to Lucius Vitellius in c. 36 C.E. and would have recently arrived in Italy at the time of the Baiae procession.<sup>56</sup> His participation in the spectacle is described by Suetonius and Cassius Dio, and while the latter may have used the former as a source, that prospect is ultimately conjecture.<sup>57</sup> Dārāw did not appear on the first day of the show, when Caligula traversed the pontoon from Baiae to Puteoli, marching from west to east. Instead, he accompanied the emperor only on the second day, during the subsequent return in the opposite direction. Dio relates that Dārāw was displayed as a prize of war:<sup>58</sup>

κάνταυθα τῆς ὑστεραίας ἀναπαυσάμενος ὥσπερ ἐκ μάχης, ἀνεκομίσθη διὰ τῆς αὐτῆς γεφύρας ἐφ' ἄρματος, χιτῶνα χρυσόπαστον ἐνδύς: ἦγον δὲ αὐτὸν οἱ ἀθληταὶ ἵπποι οἱ ἀξιονικότατοι. καὶ ἄλλα τε αὐτῷ πολλὰ ὡς καὶ λάφυρα συνηκολούθησε, καὶ Δαρεῖος ἀνὴρ Ἀρσακίδης, ἐν τοῖς ὀμηρεύουσι τότε τῶν Πάρθων ὢν.

And resting there on the following day as though from battle, [Caligula] was borne back over the same bridge on a chariot, clad in a gold-embroidered tunic; and two champion horses accustomed to winning the most victories drew him. A great many things followed after him as though they were spoils, including Dārāw, an Arsacid man who was among the Parthians serving as hostages at that time.

The operative phrase has Dārāw trail the emperor's chariot "as though [he were] spoils." This is one of several remarks in the passage that signal Dio's sarcasm and contempt for the procession, which he saw as a triumphal parade occasioned by no real victory.<sup>59</sup> That sentiment might very well be justifiable, of course. All the same, the logic of the passage shows that Dārāw's status as human plunder was supposed to be taken seriously, even if some commentators refused to do so.

Two scholars hold that Suetonius offers a divergent account of Dārāw's participation, but the biographer's testimony is in fact compatible with Dio's. Along with the emperor's clothing and mode of transportation, Dārāw is once again highlighted as a special feature of the return journey:<sup>60</sup>

56. On the chronology of Dārāw's journey to Italy, see Balsdon 1934: 52. The name Dārāw (Greek Dareios and Latin Darius) is attested in Manichaean Parthian: Sundermann 1981: 158; Colditz 2018: 279–80.

57. On Dio's potential use of Suetonius, see Millar 1964: 85–86.

58. Cass. Dio 59.17.5.

59. See also Cass. Dio 59.17.1, 59.17.6; discussion in Lange 2016a: 106–9.

60. Suet. *Calig.* 19.2. [Aurel. Vict.] *Epit.* 3.9 describes the emperor's garment as an *aureum paludamentum*.

Per hunc pontem ultro citro commeavit biduo continenti, primo die phalerato equo insignisque quercea corona et caetra et gladio aureaque chlamyde, postridie quadrigario habitu curriculoque biiugi famosorum equorum, prae se ferens Dareum puerum ex Parthorum obsidibus.

Over this bridge [Caligula] passed to and fro for two successive days. On the first day he went on a decorated horse, distinguished by a crown of oak leaves, a small shield, a sword, and a golden chlamys. On the next day he wore the costume of a charioteer on a chariot drawn by a pair of renowned horses, making a prominent display of Dārāw, a boy from among the Parthian hostages.

Along with the remark about the emperor's charioteer outfit, Ann Kuttner and Joel Allen take the phrase *prae se ferens Dareum* to mean that Caligula served as Dārāw's charioteer in a playful inversion of ceremonial norms.<sup>61</sup> But this misunderstands the Latin idiom *prae se ferre*, which means "to make a conspicuous display," as in fact a proximate passage in the life of Caligula demonstrates.<sup>62</sup> Caligula is accused of self-debasement elsewhere in Suetonius's life, to be sure, and it is true that Nero is supposed to have appeared in public as a charioteer. But Suetonius allocates the emperor's shameful behavior—unlike his account of the Baiae procession—to his account of Caligula the monster, not Caligula the emperor.<sup>63</sup> Nero, for his part, is not supposed to have served as a charioteer *for* another individual, foreign royalty least of all, and Tacitus even has him espouse the view that charioteering is a regal activity.<sup>64</sup> In short, there is nothing in Suetonius that contradicts the impression that Dio creates: the audience was meant to conclude that Dārāw was a captive, and Caligula his captor.

It was not only Dārāw's participation that gave the Baiae spectacle its Parthian dimension, however; the geography and timing of the affair also reinforced the connection to recent events in the east. Baiae featured a pontoon bridge that the emperor traversed from west to east on the first day, and back again with his new Arsacid acquisition on the second. Those details matter, because it was by a different bridge of boats over the Euphrates that Dārāw had entered Roman territory three years earlier. "Once the river had been yoked," as Josephus reports, "[Lucius Vitellius and Ardawān II] met one another in the very middle of the bridge, each with a guard around him. . . . And Ardawān sent to Tiberius his son

61. Kuttner 1995: 113; Allen 2006: 122. On Caligula's appearance as a charioteer, cf. Suet. *Calig.* 54.1.

62. Suet. *Cal.* 14.3: *namque Artabanus Parthorum rex, odium semper contemptumque Tiberi prae se ferens*; cf. Hurley 1993: 77.

63. The transition is made at Suet. *Calig.* 22.1. Wardle 1994: 202 underlines that the division is moral in nature, not chronological. If Suetonius saw anything reprehensible about Caligula's treatment of Dārāw, he could have included it at 32.1, where he does place one instance of the emperor's deeds at Baiae (his throwing of spectators into the sea) in the *monstrum* section.

64. Tac. *Ann.* 14.14.1; cf. *Ann.* 15.44.5. The view is presented as idiosyncratic. Seneca and Burrus clearly found the activity shameful, as did Tacitus and Dio; see Tac. *Ann.* 14.14.2–3; Cass. Dio 63.1.1.



Dārāw as a hostage along with many other gifts.”<sup>65</sup> The Baiae spectacle can thus be read as a restaging of the events along the Euphrates that led to the “hostage-ship” of Dārāw, an interpretation supported above all by the east-west orientation of Caligula’s bridge. On the first day of the procession the emperor marched from Baiae into Puteoli—that is, from west to east—crossing the “Euphrates” from Roman territory into Parthia. On the next day, he returned with Dārāw from east to west, re-creating the Arsacid prince’s departure from Parthia and his entrance into Roman custody. An echo of the diplomatic proceedings at the midpoint of the Euphrates may also be detected in Caligula’s decision to deliver a harangue on a makeshift platform near the center of his bridge, as Dio specifies.<sup>66</sup> The Baiae spectacle was thus a repeat performance of the conference on the Euphrates, one in which Dārāw reprised his role as a signifier of Roman supremacy.

Some scholars are skeptical that Caligula’s parade was triumphal in nature, but a denial of this aspect is only possible by insisting on republican technicalities for the imperial period. An important objection comes from David Wardle, who maintains that “the details of the episode do not suggest that Caligula mimics a triumph.” Wardle adduces the emperor’s clothing (a charioteer’s outfit, rather than the triumphal *tunica palmata*) as well as the vehicle on which he rode (a *curriculum* pulled by two horses, rather than a full-size chariot pulled by four).<sup>67</sup> Other such objections could be added: the parade was not at Rome; it had not been awarded by the Senate; Caligula wore a crown of oak and not laurel.<sup>68</sup> But it is hard to know how significant such regulations would have been some fifty years after the last republican triumph. Both Dio and the author of the *Epitome de Caesaribus* held that Caligula created the *appearance* of a triumph, even in the absence of a genuine victory to celebrate.<sup>69</sup> As Mary Beard has put it, the crux of the matter is “just how triumphlike a ceremony has to be before it counts as a triumph.”<sup>70</sup> Caligula did not have to stage a triumph by the book to crow over his acquisition of Dārāw, and the scornful judgments of later authors do not mean that his event failed to send its message: the arrival of a “hostage” showed that Rome had beaten the Arsacids in the east again.

Caligula’s display of Dārāw at Baiae built on the Greco-Persian wars tradition as a conceptual frame for Roman-Parthian relations, though the ideological

65. Joseph. *AJ* 18.102–3.

66. Cass. Dio 59.17.6.

67. Wardle 1994: 192. On Caligula’s clothing, see Cass. Dio 59.17.5; Suet. *Calig.* 19.2; cf. [Aurel. Vict.] *Epit.* 3.9. On the triumphal costume, see Versnel 1970: 56–57; Beard 2007: 225–33, esp. 228; Meister 2016: 85–87.

68. On the laurel crown as triumphal dress, see Beard 2007: 246.

69. Cass. Dio 59.17.1 intimates that he considered the event a *pompē*, if on sea rather than land; see also on this point Icks 2016: 324. [Aurel. Vict.] *Epit.* 3.9 describes Caligula with the phrase *quasi triumphans* (“as though he were triumphing”). Cf. Suet. *Calig.* 52.

70. Beard 2007: 271; emphasis in the original.

coherence of the event seems to have been minimal. The construction of a massive pontoon that turned sea into land in defiance of nature did not fail to evoke the crossings of the Bosphorus and the Hellespont by the Achaemenid kings Darius and Xerxes. Seneca suggests that Caligula wanted to *imitate* these examples, while Suetonius and Dio say that he wanted to *outdo* them.<sup>71</sup> The exhibition of an eastern prince named Dārāw/Darius as a trophy certainly supports the idea that the ancient Persians were rivals, not exemplars, and the emperor's self-costuming in a supposed breastplate of Alexander the Great makes much the same point.<sup>72</sup> The resurrection of this historical paradigm may have been obscured, even at the time, by Caligula's unpopularity and his resultant association with eastern despotism. But the continuity with Augustan precedent is clear enough: the emperor's putative triumph over the Parthian world furnished the Greco-Roman Mediterranean with another victory over the Persian east. The Arsacid who trailed the emperor's chariot could simultaneously represent three figures whom the Romans called Darius: the Arsacid son of Ardawān II, the foe of Alexander the Great, and the bridge of the Bosphorus. The subjection of one "hostage" encapsulated a world-historical narrative.

A few pieces of evidence enable comment on Dārāw's self-conception during his stay in Italy, though they cannot speak to his experience of the Baiae procession. Key testimony comes from fragments of five lead *fistulae* (water pipes) found at Nemi during the excavation of a nymphaeum. The pipes constitute the sole epigraphic attestation of an Arsacid of Rome that includes a status marker, but the title they bear is not "hostage," or "foster-child," or even "prince." They bear the Latin inscription "of Dārāw the *king*," claiming kingship for the man who supplied the nymphaeum with water.<sup>73</sup> Scholars have puzzled over the basis of Dārāw's supposed kingship because it does not seem to correspond to an office he actually exercised. It is difficult to see how he was, in point of fact, king of anything.<sup>74</sup> The difficulty can be alleviated if the title is understood as a polemical claim to the Arsacid kingship rather than as a straightforward description of political reality. By styling himself as "king" on the *fistulae* inscriptions, Dārāw stressed his Arsacid heritage and the political power that he deserved by dint of it. Whether he was adversarial to Rome is unclear, since epigraphic self-description

71. Sen. *De Brev. Vit.* 18.5. Most commentators assume that the "king" in this passage refers to Xerxes; see Barrett 1989: 212; Edmondson 1992: 166; Wardle 1994: 193; Evans 2008: 105; Bridges 2015: 171. Malloch 2001: 208–9 argues on the basis of other passages in Seneca that it refers to Alexander the Great. Suet. *Calig.* 19.3 and Cass. Dio 59.17.11 speak of rivalry with Darius and Xerxes.

72. On Alexander's breastplate, which Dio says Caligula wore on the first day of the spectacle, see Cass. Dio 59.17.3; cf. Suet. *Calig.* 52. On Alexander as a paradigm for Roman conquests in the Parthian and Sasanian east, see Nabel 2018: 205–16.

73. Initial publication in Morpurgo 1931: 252, 280.

74. See the discussions in Morpurgo 1931: 298–99; Chaumont 1992: 59; Leone 2000; Green 2007: 58 n.8; Álvarez-Pedrosa 2022: 113.

as royalty was common within the empire and need not have implied rejection of Roman overlordship.<sup>75</sup> In fact, Dārāw's use of the title could have been aimed at his fellow Arsacids of Rome rather than the emperor. His self-styling may have stressed his superior claims to kingship over those of Frahād IV's children, who represented the established branch of the dynasty in Italy. The precise date of the *fistulae* is unknowable but would add further context; perhaps Dārāw began to call himself *rex* after the death of his father Ardawān II, or after the embassy of 49 C.E. that repatriated his relative Mihrdād to Parthia in preference to him.<sup>76</sup> In any event, Dārāw's *fistulae* present an instructive contrast with his participation in the Baiae spectacle. Despite the degrading choreography of Baiae, the Arsacid dynast's self-conception was robust enough to sustain pretensions to kingship.

Of course, at least in the case of the *fistulae*, those pretensions had to remain, literally, underground. Lead water pipes were buried as a matter of course, leaving Dārāw's claims to kingship out of view. One other inscription from Nemi suggests further public advertisement, but not conclusively. The text in question is a fragmentary inscription of Hadrian datable to 122 C.E. It appears to commemorate the emperor's rededication of a structure originally erected by a figure whose full name does not survive, but who calls himself a "son [of the king of king]s of the Parthians, an Arsacid."<sup>77</sup> As the Arsacid gentilic is fully preserved on the stone, the original dedicator must have been an Arsacid of Rome. Filippo Coarelli identifies this original dedicator as Dārāw, and the original structure as the one Dārāw supplied with water through the *fistulae* inscribed with his name.<sup>78</sup> The lacunary evidence precludes certainty, but these identifications are convincing, and they improve on earlier editions of the text, which had associated it with the children of Frahād IV. It is possible, then, that Dārāw engaged in broader self-advertisement at Nemi, whether as a resident or, more likely, as a benefactor.<sup>79</sup> Yet the extant text of the Hadrianic inscription does not transmit the titulature Dārāw might have used above ground. Dārāw's *fistulae* suggest a figure who was self-assured in his royal power, but it remains an open question whether he claimed the Arsacid kingship in a public text.

The third major display of Arsacids to the Roman public took place in 66 C.E. during the opulent affair that Dio calls the "Golden Day."<sup>80</sup> The main attraction of this event was Nero's coronation of Tirdād I in the Roman forum, though this ceremony was preceded and followed by others. Tirdād was the brother of the Arsacid king of kings Walgaš/Vologaeses I. His investiture by Nero marked

75. See the inscriptions collected in Ricci 1996.

76. On Mihrdād's homegoing, see chapters 4 and 5.

77. *CIL* 14.2216 = *ILS* 843 = Hackl et al. 2010: 2.439–40.

78. Coarelli 1987: 180–81; for other possibilities, see Ricci 1996: 571–73.

79. On this question, see Bruun 1995: 52–57.

80. Cass. Dio 63.6.1. Dio's account of the Golden Day survives mostly in the epitome of Ioannes Xiphilinus, on which see Millar 1964: 2; Mallan 2013.

the end of the longest Roman-Parthian war of the first century C.E., a desultory conflict over Armenia that lasted from 54 to 63 C.E. It was precisely Walgaš's installation of Tirdād on the Armenian throne that had triggered hostilities in the first place, but the end of the war saw Nero ready to sanction this appointment provided that Tirdād visited Rome to receive his crown from the emperor in person.

The geopolitics of the war and its settlement on the Golden Day have been extensively discussed, but their connections to Arsacid "hostageship" have not. A common interpretation holds that Nero's event was an act of face-saving diplomacy: the public "submission" of Tirdād allowed Nero to cede Armenia to the Arsacid family while preserving Rome's reputation.<sup>81</sup> Yet the salvaging of honor depended, in part, on the Roman classification of visiting Parthians as hostages, and the Golden Day's triumphalism was underpinned by the Julio-Claudian practice of Arsacid exhibition. Nero's forum display should be connected to the earlier spectacles of Augustus and Caligula because the evidence suggests that Tirdād brought a new group of Arsacid "hostages" to Nero's court, as argued below. Even if he did not, the earlier pageants of Nero's predecessors had created a framework from which the Golden Day drew meaning, and Roman audiences would have interpreted the apparent "supplication" of Tirdād and his retinue through the lens of Arsacid hostageship. Inasmuch as Nero's regime could present the settlement of 63 C.E. as a Roman victory, the triumphal exhibition of Arsacids held the key.

Did Tirdād bring a group of Arsacid dynasts to Rome who were meant to stay there? Earlier discussions have overlooked this possibility, but it is strongly suggested by an inferential reading of the available sources. The relevant testimony begins with Dio, who notes that Tirdād was not the only Arsacid to journey to Italy in 66 C.E.:<sup>82</sup>

καὶ ὁ Τιριδάτης ἐς τὴν Ῥώμην, οὐχ ὅτι τοὺς ἑαυτοῦ παῖδας ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς τοῦ Οὐλογαίου τοῦ τε Πακόρου καὶ τοῦ Μονοβάζου ἄγων, ἀνήχθη.

Tirdād was brought up to Rome, bringing with him not just his own children, but also those of Walgaš, Pakōr, and Monobazus.

Tirdād came to Rome with the children of the three highest ranking Arsacids: his own; those of his brother Pakōr, the king of Media; and those of the Arsacid king of kings Walgaš.<sup>83</sup> Monobazus was the king of Adiabene, but evidently not a member of the Arsacid family. The text offers no further names or numbers. A group

81. Chaumont 1976: 123; Brunt 1990: 457; Heil 1997: 130–31, 196–97; Campbell 1993: 232–33; Wheeler 2002: 289; Griffin 1984: 227, 232; Lerouge 2007: 131; Mratschek 2013: 52. For a different view, see Frézouls 1995: 494–98, who sees the Neronian settlement as the only lasting accommodation between Rome and Parthia in the first century C.E..

82. Cass. Dio 63.1.2. This was presumably a different group than those mentioned at Tac. *Ann.* 15.30.2 and Cass. Dio 62.23.4; for a discussion of those passages, see Heil 1997: 127–28.

83. On Walgaš, Tirdād, and Pakōr as the three most powerful Arsacids, cf. Tac. *Ann.* 15.2.1.

of children from all these rulers would have amounted to a large retinue, which accords well with Dio's description of Tirdād's bombastic procession "as though in a triumph" from Parthian territory to Italy.<sup>84</sup>

Were these dynasts sent to Rome to serve as "hostages," in Roman eyes at least? Dio does not use the word *homēroi* in this section, so perhaps not. He uses the designation elsewhere in reference to Arsacids, and the simplest explanation for why he did not use it here is that he did not think the children were to serve in that capacity.<sup>85</sup> It may be that the imperfect preservation of his text (for this section, only by the Byzantine excerptor Xiphilinus) has confounded some of the details. An earlier passage describing the conference at Rhandaia in 63 C.E. relates that, after the negotiations had concluded, "both Monobazus and Walgaš came to Corbulo and gave him hostages."<sup>86</sup> That report is problematic, because Tacitus—a far more reliable source for Nero's Parthian war—puts Walgaš at Ecbatana during Tirdād's negotiations with Corbulo. Tacitus attests no such meeting between the Parthian king and the Roman general, and still less another submission of hostages. Perhaps Dio (or his excerptor) has conflated or transposed some of the events of 63 and 66 C.E., but this is mere conjecture.<sup>87</sup>

Yet the testimony of Pliny the Elder further supports the possibility that Tirdād arrived with "hostages" in 66 C.E. The relevant passage is part of Pliny's *Natural History*, an encyclopedic treatment of medicine, botany, and geography published in 77 C.E.<sup>88</sup> An experienced soldier and administrator no less than a scholar, Pliny's sources for the *Natural History* included earlier literary works but also interviews with both Romans and foreigners. The author underlines his recourse to such informants as his account turns to the geography of "the interior of Asia," a region that includes Cappadocia, the Caucasus, and—most importantly for the present discussion—Armenia.<sup>89</sup> He introduces the section with the following words:<sup>90</sup>

Nunc reddatur ingens in mediterraneo situs, in quo multa aliter ac veteres proditorum me non eo infitias, anxia perquisitis cura rebus nuper in eo situ gestis a Domitio Corbulone regibusque inde missis supplicibus aut regum liberis obsidibus.

Now let an account be given of the vast area of the interior [of Asia]. I do not deny that I will relate much that differs from the accounts of previous authors, as I took

84. Cass. Dio 63.1.2.

85. See table 1.

86. Cass. Dio 62.23.4.

87. Tac. *Ann.* 15.31. Cf. Griffin 1984: 300–1 n.64: "As the passage closes this excerpter's treatment of the subject of Armenia, it is possible that he is summing up the whole Armenian episode, noting all the salutations Nero took for successes there, including that for Tiridates' visit in 66." See also Heil 1997: 127–28.

88. On the composition and publication dates of the *Natural History*, see Baldwin 1995: 80; Murphy 2004: 3–4; Beagon 2005: 2.

89. Plin. *HN* 6.23–33.

90. Plin. *HN* 6.23.

solicitous care in ascertaining recent events in this area from Domitius Corbulo and from the kings sent from these places as suppliants or the children of kings who were sent as hostages.

Pliny names three sources that have provided him with a more reliable geography of the Asian interior than the version available in earlier authors: Corbulo, suppliant kings, and young royal hostages. Corbulo's testimony probably came from his memoirs rather than oral communication; Nero compelled the general to commit suicide shortly after his return from Armenia, so it is unlikely that Pliny had the chance to reunite with his former commander.<sup>91</sup> But the kings and their children must have been in-person informants. Pliny was often in Rome between c. 59 and 77 C.E. and perhaps even present for the Golden Day itself.<sup>92</sup> He would have been well positioned to interview the foreign royalty attached to the emperor's court, whether under Nero or Vespasian.

Even if certainty is out of reach, Pliny's statement suggests that a new group of Arsacids was installed at Nero's court during Tirdād's visit or shortly thereafter. While the regions discussed in the "interior of Asia" section include Cappadocia as well, the contrastive *autem* in the sentence that follows the quotation above makes it clear that the kings and hostages in question do not come from that land.<sup>93</sup> Moreover, Tirdād is an obvious referent for at least one of the "suppliant kings" of whom Pliny writes: whatever the realities of power behind the Golden Day, Tirdād could easily have merited the designation "suppliant" in the eyes of Romans who saw him bow before Nero.<sup>94</sup> As for the hostage children, Pliny's *liberi* matches well with the *paides* of Dio. Questions and uncertainties remain, since Pliny's statement attests the recent arrival of young hostages from Armenia, but not Parthia or Adiabene, while Dio's would seem to indicate all three. Still, the concordance between the two passages is suggestive. The visit of Tirdād in 66 C.E. may well have included another transfer of young Arsacid dynasts from Parthia to Rome.

Like the displays of Augustus and Caligula, then, the Golden Day can be understood as a public demonstration of Roman superiority to Parthia that involved the display of people whom the Romans called hostages. This dynamic once again lent the affair a triumphal dimension, as evidenced in Nero's costume: as he took his

91. Corbulo was forced to commit suicide in Greece in late 66 or early 67 C.E.; for the date, see Griffin 1992: 462–63; Levick 2013c: 541. On Corbulo's fallout with Nero, see Griffin 1984: 178; Vervaeke 2002: 168–81; Drinkwater 2019: 225–27. Pliny the Elder himself had served under Corbulo during the Roman war against the Chauci in 47 C.E.; see Plin. *HN* 16.2; Plin. *Epist.* 3.5.3; Tac. *Ann.* 11.18–19; discussion in Beagon 2005: 3; Dunn 2019: 20–24.

92. For Pliny's whereabouts during the 60s and 70s C.E., see Levick 2013a: 527–28.

93. Plin. *HN* 6.24: "we will begin, however (*autem*), from the people of Cappadocia."

94. On the prostration, see below. The label of *supplex* is further justified by lines 627–28 of the *Octavia*, which must be a reference to Tirdād's coronation. For discussion, see Nabel 2019a: 618.

seat on the rostra at dawn, the emperor wore the garb of a triumphant general.<sup>95</sup> Suetonius speaks only of Tirdād's participation in the spectacle from this point, but Dio notes that a larger group of Parthians was involved:<sup>96</sup>

καὶ μετὰ τοῦτο ὃ τε Τιριδάτης καὶ οἱ μετ' αὐτοῦ διὰ τε στοίχων ὀπλιτῶν ἐκατέρωθεν παρατεταγμένων διήλθον καὶ πρὸς τῷ βήματι προσστάντες προσεκύνησαν αὐτόν, ὥσπερ καὶ πρότερον.

Next, Tirdād and those with him passed between the rows of heavily armed soldiers, stood before the rostra, and prostrated themselves before [Nero], just as they had done before.

Tirdād's companions would have included his sons and nephews, previously mentioned by Dio as his traveling companions. It was at this point—as a group of Arsacids bent the knee to the emperor in public view—that the crowd is supposed to have roared its approval for the first time.<sup>97</sup> The sources are unanimous that the populace had turned out in droves for the spectacle, covering even the roofs of adjacent buildings with onlookers.<sup>98</sup> As in the days of Augustus and Caligula, the mirage of Roman dominance over Parthia depended on the exhibition of Arsacid bodies to massive crowds and with maximum fanfare. While no Julio-Claudian emperor had ever crowned an Arsacid king of Armenia before, others *had* hosted Arsacid “hostages” and displayed them to the public as symbols of Roman supremacy. The Golden Day continued the tradition.

Nero followed Augustan precedents in other respects as well, since the Julio-Claudian founder was the ultimate reference point for declarations of victory over Parthia. In 54 C.E., the Senate voted Nero a number of honors for his management of the situation in Armenia—prematurely, as it happened, since the crisis turned into a war that dragged on for nearly a decade. Among these honors were the right to wear the triumphal costume, an ovation, and—most significantly—a statue of Nero “of equal size to that of Mars Ultor and [erected in] the same temple.”<sup>99</sup> The choice of this deity was anchored in tradition, because Augustus had built the temple of Mars Ultor to commemorate his own “victory” over the Parthians, as discussed above. More recently, the Senate had voted to erect statues of Germanicus and Drusus in the temple after Germanicus imposed a king on Armenia in 19 C.E.<sup>100</sup> Nero's statue and its installation in the temple of Mars Ultor thus connected his

95. Suet. *Ner.* 13.1; Cass. Dio 63.4.3. The triumphal element is fully explored by Clark 2021: 8–12; on triumphal clothing, cf. Alföldi 1935: 25–38.

96. Cass. Dio 63.4.3.

97. Cass. Dio 63.5.1.

98. On the large crowds that assembled on the Golden Day, see Tac. *Ann.* 16.24.1; Cass. Dio 63.4.2; Suet. *Ner.* 13.

99. Tac. *Ann.* 13.8.1.

100. Tac. *Ann.* 2.64.1. For Germanicus's installation of Artaxias in Armenia, see Tac. *Ann.* 2.56.3.



initial declarations of success with earlier Julio-Claudian pretensions to mastery in the east.

Nero also followed Augustus and Caligula in connecting Roman-Parthian relations with the Greco-Persian wars tradition by dint of grand spectacle. In 57 C.E., he staged a *naumachia* on the Campus Martius that re-created the battle of Salamis as the combatants assumed Athenian and Persian identities. The show hearkened back to Augustus's *naumachia* of 2 B.C.E., which had reenacted the same battle.<sup>101</sup> Another evocation of this memorable spectacle came two years later, when Nero feasted the people on boats at the very spot along the Tiber where Augustus's *naumachia* had taken place.<sup>102</sup> These choices showed the continued vitality of the Persian wars tradition as a frame for Roman-Parthian relations: hostility to the Arsacids prompted Romans to reprise their roles as Greeks mounting a civilizational struggle against the Persian east. Nero's personal philhellenism may have lent the analogy additional weight, even if scholars debate the extent of his affection for the Greek past.<sup>103</sup> An Athenian inscription in honor of Nero from 61/62 C.E. even suggests that the emperor's Greek subjects could join in the project; its letters were mounted on the Parthenon, a structure that for the Athenians was inextricably connected with the Persian Wars of the fifth century B.C.E.<sup>104</sup> These precedents meant that the Golden Day's spectators could see in Tirdād's prostration not just a recent victory over a troublesome eastern kingdom, but instead the culmination of a historical grand narrative.

Monumental architecture offered another way to build on Augustus's legacy. Like his Julio-Claudian forebear, Nero commemorated his "victories" over the Arsacids with an arch, though in his case the structure stood on the Capitoline Hill.<sup>105</sup> Tacitus wryly notes its ongoing construction in 62 C.E. despite Paetus's recent humiliation at Rhandaia.<sup>106</sup> It was apparently voted by the Senate in 58 C.E. after Corbulo's destruction of Artaxata, though Tacitus is not entirely clear on this point.<sup>107</sup> The arch is not extant, and it is likely that it did not long outlast Nero's reign.<sup>108</sup> But an ancient visual representation survives, because Nero—like Augustus—minted coins to disseminate the monument's image. The series was

101. Cass. Dio 61.9.5; Suet. *Ner.* 12.1; cf. Tac. *Ann.* 13.31.1; discussion in Champlin 2003: 68. On Augustus's *naumachia*, see above.

102. Cass. Dio 61.20.5.

103. On Nero's philhellenism, see Griffin 1984: 208; Mratschek 2013; Drinkwater 2019: 373. But cf. Champlin 2003: 54, who views the emperor's love for Greece as "sharply limited."

104. *IG* ii<sup>2</sup>.3277; but see now the text in Carroll 1982: 16. For the inscription's place in the Persian Wars tradition see Carroll 1982: 67–73; Spawforth 1994: 234–37.

105. Clark 2021: 15–17 discusses the interplay with Augustus's arch. On the topography of Nero's arch see further La Rocca 1992: 408–11.

106. Tac. *Ann.* 15.18.1.

107. Tac. *Ann.* 13.41.4; cf. Furneaux 1907: 339; Koestermann 1963–68: 4.194; Kleiner 1985: 70.

108. Kleiner 1985: 94–95; La Rocca 1992: 404.



minted at Rome and Lugdunum from 64–67 C.E.<sup>109</sup> Unlike Augustus's arch, the top of Nero's apparently featured Roman soldiers rather than Parthians. But both Nero and Augustus topped their arches riding *quadrigae*. Moreover, a statue of Mars in the lower niche could have directed the viewer's mind to the temple of Mars Ultor—another building that represented Roman victory over Parthia, and that also featured a statue of Nero.<sup>110</sup> A relief fragment found at Rome may have originally belonged to Nero's arch: it features a bare-headed Parthian with a full beard and the V-shaped tunic that was characteristic of Parthian dress. Interpretations have varied, but the fragment may date to the reign of Nero, and if so, his Parthian arch is one plausible context.<sup>111</sup> The Parthian's beard and V-shaped tunic might have reminded a Roman viewer of the Parthian on the breastplate of Augustus's Prima Porta statue, a visually similar representation.<sup>112</sup>

In a final nod to Augustan precedent, Nero closed the doors of the Temple of Janus to proclaim universal peace after his war with the Parthians was over. Suetonius has Nero shutting the doors after Tirdād's visit in 66 C.E., but coins that date as early as 64 show the closed doors of the temple.<sup>113</sup> The legend on these issues reads "with peace for the Roman people having been obtained on land and sea, he closed (the Temple of) Janus by decree of the Senate."<sup>114</sup> The first phrase ("peace obtained on land and sea") was unmistakably an Augustan slogan. While it was used in reference to several of Augustus's accomplishments, it was most closely connected with his three closures of the doors of Janus.<sup>115</sup> It is not entirely clear whether any of these closures were related to Parthian affairs, but a number of ancient sources both Augustan and later seem to have drawn this conclusion.<sup>116</sup> For Nero as for Augustus, then, the shut doors on the Temple of Janus proclaimed the reassertion of Roman supremacy in the east and the humbling of the Parthian empire.

Inaccurate though it may be, Suetonius's connection of the temple's closure to the coronation of Tirdād shows the immense impact of the king's coronation and the public obeisance of his Arsacid retinue—whether these young dynasts

109. Kleiner 1985: 72, 99–153; Champlin 2003: 216–17.

110. Kleiner 1985: 80–81.

111. Neronian date: Hölcher 1988: 537–41, with references to earlier literature. Originally part of Nero's Parthian arch: La Rocca 1992: 411–14.

112. Cf. Hölcher 1988: 538; Schneider 1998: 100–2.

113. Suet. *Ner.* 13.2. See further Townend 1980; Griffin 1984: 122; Syme 1989: 118.

114. For this legend (sometimes with minor variations) see the types cited in Champlin 2003: 307–8 n.92.

115. The connection to Janus is clear in *Mon. Anc.* 13; Suet. *Aug.* 22. But the phrase was also used in reference to the victory at Actium (see the dedication from Octavian's campsite memorial in Murray and Petsas 1989: 76; cf. Liv. 1.19.3) and possibly after the defeat of Sextus Pompeius in 36 B.C.E. (App. *B Civ.* 5.130; cf. Lange 2009: 35). For discussion, see Lange 2009: 111–23, 146–48; Wardle 2014: 181–82.

116. See the sources and discussion in Syme 1984: 1192, who concludes: "... at an early stage two of the closures, and even all three, amalgamate to a single transaction which tends to be associated with Parthia."

subsequently became hostages or not. In geopolitical terms, Tirdād's visit meant nothing; it merely ratified the conclusions of the Rhandaia conference three years earlier. In terms of the treaty's reception, however, the event meant everything. In the eyes of the Julio-Claudian emperors, Nero's not least, Roman-Parthian relations did not only happen in Armenia or on the Euphrates frontier. They happened in Rome, in view of a domestic audience whose conception of Roman standing in the east in some ways mattered much more than who sat on the Armenian throne. A satisfactory status quo was not merely achieved with armies and diplomacy. It had to be staged—Suetonius uses the theatrical verb *producere*—in the heart of the empire and in public.<sup>117</sup>

If Julio-Claudian mastery of Parthia was a production that required constant reprisal, the Arsacids of Rome were the indispensable supporting cast. The Golden Day may have been especially lavish in the scale of its production, but it followed a script that Nero's predecessors had written. The show required Arsacid bodies to achieve its intended effect, and the numerous submissions of "hostages" from Parthia to Rome supplied the raw material from which the spectacle was fashioned. If Tirdād took a knee in the forum alongside a group of royal children who later remained at the emperor's court, then the affair represents the last major "hostage" transfer of the Julio-Claudian period. Even if none of these Arsacids stayed with Nero, however, the Roman audience would have viewed the ceremony through the lens of hostageship, whose close connections with the triumphal tradition conditioned Romans to see Arsacids in their city as a sign of Parthian subordination.

Collectively, the exhibitions of Augustus, Caligula, and Nero turned the Arsacids of Rome into hostages, trophies, and symbols of control. Encouraged by ingrained imperialism and the triumphal celebration of conquest, the label of "hostage" gave Romans of the early principate confidence in their empire's mastery of the Parthian world beyond the Euphrates. Hence the overwhelming designation of the city's Arsacids as *obsides* or *homēroi* in Greco-Roman literary sources, even by authors who questioned Rome's proclamations of superiority to the Arsacid kingdom or the universality of Roman rule. The Arsacids of Rome were called hostages because the idea flattered Roman self-conception. Public exhibitions, visual representations, and the force of habit made the label stick.

#### PATRONAL FOSTERAGE

But while hostageship may have been the dominant viewpoint on the Roman side, it was not the *only* viewpoint, because additional evidence suggests that the Arsacids of Rome could also be described as kin of the Julio-Claudian family. One author, Tacitus, directly applies the language of fosterage to the Arsacids

117. See Kierdorf 1992: 177, with comment on the verb *producere*.

of Rome, and several key pieces of evidence from the Augustan period can be reinterpreted against this background. Yet even where kinship offered common ground as a mode of engagement between the Arsacids and the Caesars, the scope for misunderstanding between the two sides was still ample, because their cultures conceived of fosterage in divergent ways. To the limited extent that the Romans regarded their Arsacids as the emperor's foster-children, they had a patronal view of the arrangement that would have been at odds with the Parthian cliental model. The two families may have been kin, in other words, but they had different ideas about the political ramifications of their kinship.

The minimal purchase of fosterage in early imperial sources for the Arsacids of Rome is in one sense attributable to the empire's republican past: as a new-comer to dynasty, Rome had little background with interdynastic kinship. To be sure, Rome saw its share of the "kinship diplomacy" that flourished among the poleis of the Hellenistic world. Literary and epigraphic sources preserve many cases of this diplomatic strategy, which saw poleis appeal to relatedness as a basis for reciprocal obligations in their interaction with foreign communities.<sup>118</sup> But these kinships were attributed to shared descent from mythic ancestors or colonization, and more importantly, they applied to entire political communities, not ruling families. Moreover, Rome may not have taken to kinship diplomacy to the extent that its Greek neighbors did. Even during the republic, in Sue Elwyn's assessment, kinship played "only a small role in Rome's expansion and foreign policy."<sup>119</sup> At any rate, the implication of the Romans in this sort of kinship discourse provided little experience with the kinship politics that had prevailed for so long in the ancient Near East, where interdynastic relations were personal, not communitarian.

Even when Romans of the republic heard kinship appeals from individuals rather than entire political communities, the republic's regime type obstructed the establishment of familial ties. When the Seleucid hostage Demetrius I spoke before the Senate to ask for his release, he called Rome his "fatherland and nurturer," the senators his "fathers," and their sons his "brothers," at least according to Polybius.<sup>120</sup> In a much later account of this speech by the fragmentary historian Granius Licinianus, Demetrius calls the Senate his "parent."<sup>121</sup> The effectiveness of Demetrius's speech is debatable. Polybius says that the senators were touched, but evidently not enough to grant the Seleucid's release. More to the

118. Literary and inscriptional evidence is collected and discussed in Elwyn 1991: 9–138; see more recently the studies of Jones 1999; Patterson 2010a; Patterson 2010b; Gruen 2011: 223–307.

119. Elwyn 1993: 261.

120. Polyb. 31.2.5; discussion in Walbank 1979: 466.

121. Granius Licinianus 28.39.1 = Criniti 1981: 9. Granius lived in the second century C.E. and produced a compendium of Roman history that survives only in fragments. See Criniti 1993; Conte 1994: 551.

point, his appeal to constructed kinship was an awkward fit with the size of his audience. In the world of the Hellenistic courts, fosterers were individual dignitaries. But in the Roman Senate, the title of “father” had to be extended to some three hundred men, or to the institutional body as a whole.<sup>122</sup> This divergence made fosterage, and appeals to the bonds that it formed, a poor way to liaise with the primary institution of Roman foreign affairs.<sup>123</sup> By all indications, then, Rome’s republican mode of government limited the scope of interdynastic kinship and elite fosterage as modes of foreign politics, even if the Senate’s dealings with Hellenistic dynasts introduced trends that could accelerate once Rome fell under a different type of regime.

The subsumption of Roman imperial governance into the kinship networks of the Julio-Claudian family has been well treated in previous studies, but the Arsacids of Rome show that a part of this story has yet to be properly told: Arsacid fosterage brought dynasts from *outside the empire* into the house of Caesar. Kinship thereby revealed itself not only as a domestic organizing principle, but as a means of interfacing with political entities beyond Rome’s borders. The question of “how and why the family of Augustus became a part of the Roman state” has benefited from a number of scholarly treatments, and the role of the dynasty at the center of Rome’s transition from republic to empire has been much discussed.<sup>124</sup> Yet the Arsacids of Rome made the Julio-Claudian family not part of the Roman state so much as a political entity that transcended the Roman state, tied together as it was with Parthia’s ruling dynasty through the bonds of fosterage. The evidence that the Julio-Claudian family was aware of and perhaps even nurtured these kinships is much slighter than the preponderance of sources that categorize the Arsacids as hostages. There is enough, however, to speak of a “recognized, if limited” Roman espousal of fosterage, if only under discrete circumstances and by a small group of elites.<sup>125</sup>

The main source for Arsacid-Caesarian kinship is Tacitus, who uses the language of fosterage in two passages dealing with the Arsacids of Rome. The first of these shows that the emperor could consider himself their foster-father. The episode in question dates to 35 C.E., when Lucius Vitellius—the future emperor, but at this time governor of Syria—escorted one Tirdād to the banks of the Euphrates. Probably born in Italy, Tirdād was a second generation Arsacid of Rome who had gone east to challenge the kingship of Ardawān II. After partaking in the Zoroastrian tradition of horse sacrifice on the banks of the Euphrates,

122. On the size of the Senate in the Middle Republic, see Lintott 1999: 69–70.

123. On the Senate’s management of foreign affairs, see Polyb. 6.13.8–9.

124. Quotation: Severy 2003: 3. Other key studies include Kuttner 1995; Bang 2011; Hekster 2015.

125. Quotation: Kuttner 1995: 115.

Tirdād received a few words of advice from Vitellius.<sup>126</sup> Tacitus reports them as follows:<sup>127</sup>

[Vitellius] monet Tiridaten primoresque, hunc, Phraatis avi et altoris Caesaris quae<que> utrobique pulchra meminerit, illos, obsequium in regem, reverentiam in nos, decus quisque suum et fidem retinerent.

Vitellius gave advice to Tirdād and the nobility. He advised the former to remember his grandfather Frahād and his foster-father Caesar, and what was good about each of them. He advised the latter to remain obedient to their king and respectful to us, each keeping his own honor and loyalty.

Vitellius imagines that Tirdād has a double lineage, both Parthian and Roman, Arsacid and Caesarian.<sup>128</sup> Most readers take the *altor* of this sentence to simply mean Tiberius, but the use of the dynastic name *Caesar* has a larger significance.<sup>129</sup> The ambiguity of the referent shows that the emperor's foster-fatherhood was, like interdynastic brotherhood in the late Bronze Age, a transferable position in a systemized kinship arrangement, not an individual attribute.<sup>130</sup> The emperor was the fosterer of the Arsacids of Rome no matter who the emperor was. Tacitus's first use of fosterage terminology thus shows the establishment of kinship relations between the dynasties of Rome and Parthia and the acknowledgment of this kinship on the Roman side.

Tacitus's second invocation of such language is less straightforward, however, because this time the terminology of fosterage is applied not to the emperor but to the Roman state as a whole. In 49 C.E., the Senate granted an audience to envoys from the Parthian nobility who requested the release of Mihrdād, yet another Arsacid of Rome.<sup>131</sup> After the Parthians spoke, Claudius delivered an oration that touched on the virtues of Mihrdād, among other topics:<sup>132</sup>

126. Tirdād's parentage is not clear. Tac. *Ann.* 6.37.4 says that his grandfather was Frahād, which apparently means Frahād IV; thus Wheeler 2016: 190; Woodman 2017: 229. His father is nowhere specified. Tirdād could have been one of the grandsons of Frahād IV sent to Italy between 19–9 B.C.E. (see table 1). But Tacitus (*Ann.* 6.43.3) writes of his "boyhood," which would not fit a man in his mid-40s. Cass. Dio 58.26 contains no additional information. On balance, it seems best to conclude that Tirdād was born at Rome. Horse sacrifice: Tac. *Ann.* 6.37.2 with Daryaei 2022.

127. Tac. *Ann.* 6.37.4; text from Woodman 2017: 39.

128. Cf. Joseph. *AJ* 18.46 on the double inheritance of Vonones, though without the language of kinship and/or family relations.

129. *Altor* as a reference to Tiberius: Ziegler 1964: 61; Allen 2006: 136.

130. On the transferability of brotherhood in the Amarna system, see chapters 1 and 2 on EA 29.

131. Tac. *Ann.* 11.10.4 says that Mihrdād was "given to us [i.e. the Romans] in hostageship," which might suggest that he was sent to Rome during the kingship of his father Vonones. But it is also possible that he arrived during the transfer of 19–9 B.C.E. (see table 1 for sources), or that he was born in Rome. Vonones died in 19 C.E. (Tac. *Ann.* 2.68), so Mihrdād must have been at least thirty, or just shy of it. Tacitus calls him a *iuvenis* (*Ann.* 12.11.3).

132. Tac. *Ann.* 12.11.3.

Hinc versus ad legatos extollit laudibus alumnum urbis, spectatae ad id modestiae: ac tamen ferenda regum ingenia neque usui crebras mutationes.

Then, having turned to the ambassadors, [Claudius] extolled with praise the foster-child of the city, a man of evident modesty up to that time. All the same, the tempers of kings had to be endured, and numerous revolutions were not useful.

Claudius's description of Mihrdād as an *alumnus* matches Tiberius's role as the *altor* of Tirdād. The etymology of the terms connects the two passages: both words derive from the verb *alere*, "to nourish," figuratively extending the vocabulary of breast-feeding and child-rearing to created kinships.<sup>133</sup> The collocation of the two terms is crucial and not self-explanatory, since *alumnus* is elsewhere paired with different terms like *dominus* ("lord, master") or *erus* ("master of a house/family").<sup>134</sup>

But although the *alumnus* of this speech recalls Vitellius's description of Tiberius as *altor*, the interdynastic aspect of the fosterage arrangement is absent in Claudius's case: Mihrdād is described not as the emperor's foster-son, but as the foster-son of the city. What explains the additional qualification? On the one hand, perhaps the phrase was simply idiomatic. There are literary and epigraphic parallels where *alumnus* is paired with a place name in the genitive to indicate where a person was raised.<sup>135</sup> Yet the setting and the audience also help explain the description. Whereas Vitellius addressed only Parthians, Claudius spoke before the Roman Senate. Just as Demetrius the Seleucid applied the concept of fatherhood to the hundreds of senators present at his audience, Claudius's kinship rhetoric made the entire Roman state the *altor* of Mihrdād, and the emperor did not claim this title for himself. Despite the advent of the Julio-Claudian dynasty, the community-based kinship rhetoric of the late republic retained its currency. In this instance, Arsacid fosterage created a kinship that was interstate but not interdynastic.

Indeed, perhaps the most striking feature of *alumnus urbis* is the phrase's ability to simultaneously satisfy the expectations of the emperor's Parthian and Roman audiences. The words capture a basic relationship of fosterage and pro-parentage, but with enough latitude to support variable understandings among the key participants. For those on the Parthian side, including the Arsacids themselves, the *altor/alumnus* vocabulary could have seemed like a translation of *dāyagānī*, which (as argued in chapter 1) is likely to have been the operative institution for political

133. Dixon 1999: 225; Nielsen 2013: 289; Nielsen 1987: 143, citing Servius *Comm. Aen.* 11.33 and Isid. *Orig.* 10.3. Cf. O'Donnell 2020: 19 on the derivation of Irish foster terminology from *altram*, a verb that "at base, carries connotations of feeding and nurturing."

134. See Stat. *Silv.* 2.1, in which the poet consoles Atedius Melior after the death of Glaucias, his *alumnus* (2.1.1). Melior is called the child's *altor* (2.1.69), but also his *dominus* (2.1.70) and his *erus* (2.1.129). On fosterage in this poem, see further Bernstein 2015: 150–51. Carroll 2006: 204 discusses *CIL* 13.2032, an epitaph set up by a *dominus* for his *alumnus*.

135. See Quint. 8.1.3 with Hölkeskamp 2004: 293; Juv. 1.20 with Larmour 2007: 178 and n.22. For inscriptional evidence, see Hemelrijk 2015: 248–55 and n.68, with references.

elites from the Iranian plateau. Like *dāyag*, the words *altor* and *alumnus* describe pro-parental relations through the language of nursing and breast-feeding. On the Roman side, the application of kinship terminology to the Roman body politic had precedents in the republican period, and it spoke to the senators in a language they were used to hearing. A phrase like *alumnus urbis* could therefore find anchor points in both Parthian and Roman expectations while leaving ample scope for misunderstanding to persist.

And divergence in understanding there must have been, because the wider evidence for the *altor/alumnus* relationship in the Roman world shows that, as a general rule, foster-children were the social inferiors of their fosterers. Roman fosterage, in other words, was patronal.<sup>136</sup> The epigraphic record is replete with *alumni* from lower status backgrounds. Some, though perhaps not many, may have been foundlings rescued from exposure.<sup>137</sup> Others were apprentices.<sup>138</sup> Still others were *deliciae*, *vernae* (slaves born within the Roman household), or *servi*; sometimes these figures were manumitted before they became *alumni/ae*, but not always.<sup>139</sup> The fosterage of an *alumnus* or *alumna* was also distinct from adoption, a legal process by which elite male Romans acquired an heir to their name and estate—typically another elite male and often a close relative.<sup>140</sup> While *alumni/ae* had rights under Roman law, they were not the legal equivalents of a son or daughter.<sup>141</sup> For a member of the Roman aristocracy, an *alumnus* was no substitute for an adopted son. Adoptees came from social backgrounds closely comparable to those of their adopters, but *alumni/ae* were far more likely to be their inferiors.

The social history of Roman fosterage offers indispensable context for the appearance of *altor* and *alumnus* in Tacitus's descriptions of the Arsacids of Rome. When Vitellius and Claudius describe the Arsacids of Rome as foster-children, they are designating them social inferiors—and asserting, by extension, Roman superiority to the Arsacid dynasty and the empire that it ruled. This is no comment on the emotions that underpinned the personal relationships between Caesarians and Arsacids. Claudius may well have been sincere in his praise of Mīhrdād, for instance, though the evidence cannot ultimately resolve that question. Rather, the

136. Nielsen 1997: 183, 190. On Tac. *Ann.* 12.11 in this sense, see also Allen 2019: 106–7.

137. Scholars variously assess how frequently *alumni/ae* would have been foundlings; compare e.g. Nielsen 1987: 160; Corbier 2001: 70; Dyson 2011: 37; Edmondson 2011: 358; Grubbs 2013: 95 with Bellemore and Rawson 1990: 5; Nielsen 2013: 289.

138. Carroll 2006: 202–3; Nielsen 2013: 289.

139. Rawson 1986: 173; Nielsen 1987: 144–46, 153; Bradley 1991: 62; Corbier 2001: 70–71; Rawson 2003: 252–54, 262. On *deliciae*, see Laes 2003: 320. See esp. *Dig.* 40.2.14 on the manumission of *alumni*.

140. On adoption and its differences with fosterage, see Corbier 1991: 63–76; Dixon 1992: 112–13 (who mentions that adoption was primarily a custom among the “ruling class”); Rawson 2003: 250; Golden 2009: 47; Lindsay 2011: 354–59; Huebner 2013: 510–11. Roman preference for close relatives as adoptees: Lindsay 2001: 201.

141. On the legal rights of *alumni/ae*, see Nielsen 1987: 148–57.



social dimensions of Roman fosterage—to the extent that this institution applied to the Arsacid case—offered yet another confirmation of Roman supremacy and Arsacid subordination. A Parthian *dāyag* would have looked at his foster-child and seen a social superior; the Roman *altor* saw the opposite.

The kinship and fosterage arrangements attested in Tacitus allow for new perspectives on other key sources for the Arsacids of Rome, and on a crucial passage in the *Res Gestae* not least. Augustus's description of the 19–9 B.C.E. transfer is direct evidence for how the emperor wanted this event to be remembered, and it is the earliest extant testimony for the Arsacids of Rome. Yet the passage's implications for Arsacid-Caesarian kinship have been overlooked. The relevant sentence runs as follows:<sup>142</sup>

Ad [me re]x Parthorum Phrates, Orod[i]s filius, filios suos nepot[esque omnes] misit in Italiam non bello superatu[s], sed amicitiam nostram per [libe]ror[um] suorum pignora petens.

To me Urūd's son Frahād, the king of the Parthians, sent all his sons and grandsons into Italy, not because he was conquered in war, but seeking our friendship through the *pignora* of his own children.

What does *pignus* mean here? It is common to translate the word into English as “pledges” in the sense of “guarantees of good behavior.”<sup>143</sup> Other scholars take their cues from the literary sources for this Arsacid transfer—all of which call Frahād's children *obsides* or *homēroi*—and conclude that *pignus* basically means “hostage,” or was a gentler alternative to it.<sup>144</sup> On this reading, the sentence boasts that the ruler of the Parthian empire has tendered submission.

But the background of Arsacid fosterage suggests a different, though not incompatible, understanding of the phrase: *pignora* means “children.” Anthony Birley has broached this possibility, though the idea has not been taken up.<sup>145</sup> *Pignus* can be found with this meaning in Augustan and post-Augustan literature, suggesting a new accretion to the word's valences at the beginning of the Julio-Claudian period.<sup>146</sup> The sense comes from the connection between love and procreation: children are the manifest pledges of love between parents.<sup>147</sup> The usage is more

142. *Mon. Anc.* 32.2; text from Cooley 2009: 96.

143. Brunt and Moore 1967: 34–35; Braund 1984: 12; Drijvers 1998: 290 and n.64; Kleiner and Buxton 2008: 59; Cornwell 2017: 149 and n.77; Olbrycht 2018: 391. Cf. “Unterpfand” in German scholarship: Ziegler 1964: 52; Thommen in Hackl et al. 2010: 2.51–52; Wiesehöfer 2010: 187; Strothmann 2012: 85. Nedergaard 1988: 108 translates “tokens”; Allen 2006: 104 opts for “securities.”

144. Dąbrowa 1987: 69 n.3.

145. Birley 2007: 539.

146. *TLL* 10.1.2125.35.

147. Ferri 2003: 207; Francese 2007: 18. See esp. Prop. 4.11.12, 73 with Butrica 2006: 32; Heyworth 2007a: 512–13; Heyworth 2007b: 125; Heyworth 2019: 125.



common in poetry, but it is represented in prose as well.<sup>148</sup> There is even a parallel in the *Senatus Consultum de Cn. Pisone Patre* – a public inscription roughly contemporary with the *Res Gestae*—in which reference is made to the “numerous children” (*tot pignora*) of Germanicus and Agrippina.<sup>149</sup> “Children” may not be the only or even the primary meaning of *pignora* in the *Res Gestae*, of course. But there is enough evidence to say that the word had this connotation in Augustan Rome, and that its appearance in the context of a sentence about Arsacid children would have invited readers to consider the familial dimension.

If *pignora* means “children,” then the sentence hints at the integration of Arsacid dynasts into Julio-Claudian kinship structures. The phrase in question would then mean that Frahād sought friendship “through the children of his own children.” That reading works on a literal level, since the grandchildren (*nepotes*) of Frahād have just been mentioned in the immediately preceding phrase.<sup>150</sup> More generally, though, the point may be that the Parthian king’s dispatch of his progeny was not simply a guarantee of good behavior, but rather a confirmation of friendship through joint parentage of sons and daughters. Such a reading recalls Suetonius on Augustus’s policy toward client kings, namely that “he brought up many of their children and educated them alongside his own.”<sup>151</sup> In this light, the terms of the exchange between Augustus and Frahād diverge from the usual scholarly discussions that revolve around wars, armies, borders, and treaties. The emperor may be speaking of those facets of Roman-Parthian relations, but he is also saying, “to be my friend, Frahād sent me children.”

An additional sign of Arsacid-Caesarian unification through kinship may be found in a passage from Ovid’s *Ars Amatoria* (The Art of Love) that contains perhaps the sole reference to the Arsacids of Rome in Latin verse.<sup>152</sup> The passage dates to 2 B.C.E., when Augustus’s grandson and adopted heir Gaius Caesar prepared to embark for Parthia in a campaign against Frahātak, the son and successor of Frahād IV. Book 1 of Ovid’s *Ars Amatoria* dates to the same year and contains a long exhortation to the young commander, including the following lines:<sup>153</sup>

Cum tibi sint fratres, fratres ulciscere laesos,  
Cumque pater tibi sit, iura tuere patris.  
Induit arma tibi genitor patriaeque tuusque;  
Hostis ab invito regna parente rapit.

148. E.g. Tac. *Ann.* 12.2.1.

149. *SCPP* 139 = Potter and Damon 1999: 34–35. On the passage, see also Potter 1999: 76 and n.40; Seager 2013: 52.

150. Cf. Ov. *Met.* 3.134: *tot natos natasque et, pignora cara, nepotes*.

151. Suet. *Aug.* 48.1.

152. I argue in Nabel 2015 that two passages from Horace (*Carm.* 2.2.17–24; *Epist.* 1.12.25–28) may allude to Rome’s first Arsacid resident, but the identification is not definitive.

153. Ov. *Ars Am.* 1.195–98; text after Hollis 1977.

Since you have brothers, avenge the brothers who have been wronged. Since you have a father, defend a father's rights. The sire of the fatherland, and of you, girds you with weapons; the enemy snatches rulership from an unwilling parent.

The referents of *fratres* and *pater* have proven difficult to sort out, all the more so because both words are repeated in their respective lines. An earlier commentator thought that both occurrences of the word *fratres* referred to Gaius's biological brothers Lucius Caesar and Agrippa Postumus, while Augustus was the referent of both *paters*.<sup>154</sup> But almost all scholars now accept the reading of A. S. Hollis, whose crucial insight was to understand *fratres laesi* as a reference to the Arsacids of Rome, that is, the four sons of Frahād IV who came to Rome between 19 and 9 B.C.E.<sup>155</sup> On his reading, the "murder" of Frahād IV by Frahātak (the *hostis* of line 198) was an affront to the Roman Arsacids, and Gaius needed to avenge the crime by punishing Frahātak and setting the Arsacid family to rights.<sup>156</sup>

Given the abstruseness of the lines and the fact that "Ovid leaves a fair bit for the reader to do," however, another reading should be entertained: the Arsacids of Rome are Gaius's brothers, and the passage is further evidence for the interconnection of the Caesarian and Arsacid families.<sup>157</sup> A recent suggestion along these lines is made by Nandini Pandey, who speaks of "Gaius' fraternity with [the Arsacids in Rome]" but then calls the latter "Gaius' contemporaries and perhaps even play-mates" and stops short of explicit identifications.<sup>158</sup> If the idea of confraternity is taken to its conclusion, the line would mean, in effect, "since you have the Arsacids as brothers, go and avenge the injury to them." But could both occurrences of *fratres* have the same referent? In fact, another line of Ovid uses precisely the same doubling of *frater* to refer to a single individual, and comparable repetitions in Latin poetry refer to brothers from the same family, usually in the context of civil war.<sup>159</sup> The point is not simply that, as a dutiful son, Gaius should help other sons to do their duty. The murder of Frahād IV affects Gaius because the late Parthian king's sons are, in a concrete sense, his own brothers.

This reading of Ovid's text raises the question of whether parental foster-age relationships extended to the fosterer's natal children. Did one become the

154. Lenz 1969: 47, 176. For other translations and discussion before Hollis' intervention, see Bornecque 2002 [1924]: 9; Kelk 1975: 112; Williams 1978: 76.

155. Hollis 1977: 77–78, preceded by Hollis 1970; followed by Syme 1978: 9; Pianezzola 1991: 212; Dimundo 2003: 100–1; Casali 2006: 224–26; Luther 2010: 108 and n.22.

156. The assassination of Frahād IV is otherwise attested only in Joseph. *AJ* 18.42–43. Yardley and Heckl 1997: 5 suggest that Just. 42.4.16 may refer to the murder as well, but this reading is not secure: see Bigwood 2004: 42 and n.29.

157. Quotation from Casali 2006: 225.

158. Pandey 2018: 181–82.

159. See Ov. *Met.* 11.410, where two *fratres* on a single line refer to Ceyx's brother, Daedalion; cf. A. Griffin 1997: 185. On other such repetitions of *frater*, see Wills 1996: 205–6.

foster-sibling of their parent's *alumni/ae*? One inscription may suggest so. In a funerary epitaph for one Marcus Vibius Proclus, the dedicator Paenia Daphne calls Vibius her *alumnus*, and she designates her natal son as Vibius's *collect[aneus]*, which means "foster-brother."<sup>160</sup> The word is not common in literature, though it does appear in legal texts and in a handful of inscriptions.<sup>161</sup> Its literal meaning is "milk-sharer," and it refers to multiple children who were not natal brothers or sisters feeding at the breast of the same woman, most often a wet-nurse.<sup>162</sup> It is unclear, however, whether the term could be used figuratively if the two parties in question had not actually shared breast milk, as Gaius and the sons of Frahād IV certainly did not.<sup>163</sup> Vibius's epitaph is modest testimony that kinship bonds could develop between natal and fostered children, even if it is not conclusive for the meaning of Ovid's verses on Arsacid and Caesarian brotherhood.

A material correlate to the Ovidian passage comes from the south frieze of the Ara Pacis, where a pair of figures may supply evidence for the Arsacids of Rome from the visual arts. The Senate voted to erect the altar in honor of Augustus in 13 B.C.E., and it was dedicated in 9 B.C.E.—a window that corresponds closely to the arrival of Vonones and his brothers.<sup>164</sup> The south frieze shows a procession that some see as a *supplicatio*, but others as a quasi triumph.<sup>165</sup> Among the participants is a young child who is often labeled figure S-30 in discussions of the relief. S-30 wears a decidedly non-Roman getup: he has corkscrew curls, a headband or diadem, a loose tunic, and long-laced shoes (figure 6).<sup>166</sup> He presents a contrast with the three other children on the same face of the monument, all of whom wear the togas and *bullae* that were characteristic of Roman dress. The woman standing behind the young boy is also diademed, and she is the only woman in the entire procession who wears earrings and a scarf.<sup>167</sup> She rests her hand on the boy's head, while the boy himself grabs the toga of the man who precedes him.

160. *CIL* 6.1903. Variant forms of *collectaneus/a* include *conlacteus*, *collecteus*, and *collectius*.

161. Literary references: Hyg. *Fab.* 224.3.3; Maurus Servius Honoratus, *In Vergilii Georgicon Libros* 1.205.5. Legal texts: Gai. *Inst.* 1.38–39; Dig. 40.2.13. Inscriptions: see table 1 in Bradley 1979: 60–61.

162. On wet-nursing among Roman elite families, see Joshel 1986; Bradley 1986; Laes 2016: 69–77; Centlivres Challet 2017a: 898; Centlivres Challet 2017b: 377–79. Carroll 2018: 154–55 discusses material evidence and artistic representations. On *collectanei/ae* of dissimilar status, see Bradley 1979: 57–62; Dixon 1992: 128 and n.164.

163. Gaius was born in 20 B.C.E., and at least some of the sons of Frahād IV had children themselves by the time of their arrival in Rome.

164. On the dates of the Ara Pacis's construction, see Weinstock 1960: 48; Rehak 2006: 97.

165. *Supplicatio*: Billows 1993: 89–90; cf. Kleiner and Buxton 2008: 86; Cornwell 2017: 178. Quasi triumph: Settis 1988: 420; Uzzi 2005: 150–55.

166. The child is labeled S-30 in the numbering system of Pollini 1978: 75–173. For other numbering systems, see Kleiner and Buxton 2008: 65 n.28.

167. Pollini 1978: 118–19; Rose 1990: 456–59; Kuttner 1995: 102.



FIGURE 6. The so-called “eastern child” (S-30) from the south frieze of the Ara Pacis. Now in the Museo dell’Ara Pacis, Rome. Photo credit: Miguel Hermoso Cuesta via Wikimedia Commons.

There are various interpretations of the child and his role in the scene, but one view is that he is an Arsacid of Rome. Identification of the figures on the Ara Pacis has always been a contentious subject, and given the idealizing style of Augustan art, it might reasonably be asked whether all its figures are meant to represent specific individuals.<sup>168</sup> But there is reason to believe that certain segments of Roman society, at least, would have had their eyes open to potential identifications, and a few modern scholarly guesses have become deeply entrenched in the literature on the monument.<sup>169</sup> Some scholars have maintained that S-30 represents Gaius

168. Cf. Kleiner 2005: 216–17 and Anderson 1998: 41, who sees the boy and the woman behind him as genre types.

169. In defense of identifying the figures on the Ara Pacis with specific historical figures, see Kleiner and Buxton 2008: 71–72. A more cautionary note is sounded by Rehak 2006: 121–22.

Caesar, clad in eastern garb to celebrate the Trojan games along with his brother Lucius, who supposedly mirrors him on the north frieze (N-34).<sup>170</sup> But others doubt that a Julio-Claudian dynast would appear in non-Roman dress, and prefer to identify the child as a prince of Bosporan, Commagenian, or indeterminate eastern extraction.<sup>171</sup> In more recent studies, however, Brian Rose and Joel Allen argue that the child may represent a son or, rather more likely given his apparent age, a grandson of Frahād IV. Rose additionally suggests that the woman behind the child is his mother and the wife of one of Frahād's sons.<sup>172</sup> This interpretation need not exclude others. Different understandings of the monument would surely have circulated in antiquity and can be reasonably maintained today. But the Arsacid identification is appealing not least because of the close chronological correspondence between the altar's construction and the arrival of Frahād's family members in the city. Moreover, the regular arrival and birth of new Arsacid "hostages" infused the Roman cityscape with young Parthian royalty until at least the end of the Julio-Claudian period. A contemporary could easily have understood S-30 in this sense.

Of course, the lack of consensus among art historians is revealing in its own right of the collapsing distinction between Augustus's Roman sons and his Arsacid fosterlings. Both Gaius Caesar and the Arsacid sons of Frahād IV were, in a way, the children of Augustus, and the ambiguous identity of the figure in eastern dress underlines their interchangeability as youths under Augustan parentage. Some scholars maintain that the Ara Pacis is a monument about dynastic succession, a visual argument that "sustained prosperity depends on the continued rule of the 'male progeny' of the Julian line."<sup>173</sup> If so, however, it is striking that none of the children are accorded visual primacy in the reliefs, and it speaks volumes that Augustus's adopted son Gaius—with all the legal rights that adoption entailed—should be iconographically similar to an Arsacid foster-son. On the Ara Pacis no less than in the *Ars Amatoria*, fosterage had fused Caesarian and Arsacid kinship structures in such a way that, in certain contexts, it was difficult to see where one family ended and the other began.<sup>174</sup>

170. Pollini 1978: 105–6, 157–58 and n.95 (revised in Pollini 1987: 22–27 to "Celtic child"); Zanker 1988: 217–18; Kleiner 1992: 96; Hurlet 1997: 114–15; La Rocca 1983: 24–31; Rossini 2007: 55.

171. Bosporan (child of Dynamis): Rose 1990: 458. Commagenian (son of Iotape I): Kuttner 1995: 103–4. "Prince of an Asiatic dynasty": Kleiner and Buxton 2008: 74. See further Severy 2003: 110.

172. Rose 2005: 40; Allen 2006: 106; followed by Schlude 2020: 98. On Augustus and female hostages, cf. Suet. *Aug.* 21.2.

173. Lamp 2009: 17.

174. For a similar reading, see Schneider 2012: 125–28. For Schneider, however, the ambiguity of S-30 (and his counterpart on the north frieze) is a sign not of Arsacid-Caesarian kinship, but of Rome's selective identification with its own construction of the East—an illustration of "a conceptual overlap between seemingly contradictory categories such as Roman and Oriental, friend and foe" (2012: 127).





FIGURE 7. Aureus of Augustus from Lugdunum, 8 B.C.E. On the reverse side, Augustus receives a child from a bearded Gaul. *RIC* 1 no. 200. Photo credit: Berlin, Münzkabinett der Staatlichen Museen, 18204901.

While the Ara Pacis presents the subsumption of foreign children into Rome's imperial order in a peaceable and benevolent guise, other Roman media underline the power differential between pro-parent and child. To the extent that the emperor served as fosterer, he was a patronal one, and his collection of children had an edge that was imperious and domineering, not innocuously sentimental. In a scene that appears on the Boscoreale Cups, on a glass gem, and on coins minted in 9 B.C.E., Augustus sits atop a platform and receives children from Gallic noblemen.<sup>175</sup> On the coin, he extends his hand to receive a child from a bearded figure who is presumably its natal father (figure 7). Though this child is Gallic, the scene models a pro-parental authority that applied to the empire as a whole, configuring children as symbols of submission and control. Some two centuries later, the paradigm found more violent expression on the triumphal arch of Septimius Severus, which commemorates his campaigns against the Arsacid kingdom. Among the beaten and shackled Parthians who are paraded in subjection at the base of the monument, one prisoner carries a baby (figure 8).<sup>176</sup> The monument parades a captive child's body as an emblem of territorial domination, and it shows the commensurability of imperial pro-parentage with the Roman institution of hostage-ship. The emperor's paternalism was domination in familial clothing; the children he gathered were so much tribute or war booty. Just as the Roman *paterfamilias*

175. *RIC* 1 no. 200, 201a–b (Sutherland and Carson 1984: 55); Kuttner 1995: 12, 107–11; Cornwell 2017: 181; Gołyźniak 2020: 225–26, 552 with figures 853–54.

176. Brilliant 1967: 151, 155–56, pedestal relief no. 14, plate 53a.



FIGURE 8. On the Arch of Septimius Severus in the Roman forum (203 C.E.), a bearded Parthian in chains carries a baby. Photo credit: Clayton Lose.

wielded uncompromising authority over the members of his household, the head of the Julio-Claudian dynasty expected subjection from his imperial children.

### CONCLUSION

For the Romans, then, the Arsacids of their city could be hostages or foster-children—but they were tokens of Parthian inferiority either way. *Hostage* was their primary designation because the label suited the self-conception and public presentation of Rome’s rulers. Julio-Claudian regimes repeatedly displayed the Arsacids of Rome in grandiose public spectacles, marshaling the triumphal traditions of the republican past to claim the power of the conqueror over the body of the hostage. When the sons of Frahād IV were led over the sands by Augustus; when Caligula paraded Dārāw across his bridge as human plunder; when Tirdād and his Arsacid retinue bowed before Nero in the forum—all such events pressed Arsacid “hostages” into service to fashion a public image of Roman supremacy and Parthian compliance.

As in Parthia, fosterage too could provide a frame of reference for understanding the Arsacids, but in Rome its degree was limited and its primary valence was patronal. Only one Roman source, Tacitus, is explicit in his application of fosterage terminology to the Arsacids of Rome. His designation of Tiberius as their *altor* is meaningful evidence for interdynastic kinship between the two ruling families, even if the implications of such kinship remain unclear. Claudius's correlative use of *alumnus* shows kinship but not of the interdynastic variety, since the full phrase "foster-child of the city" assigns the role of foster-father to the Roman state rather than to the emperor himself. The foster-childhood of the Arsacids may be alluded to in other Julio-Claudian sources, but not in an obvious or straightforward manner. In the end, fosterage had some purchase in Roman thinking about the Arsacids, but its place was secondary to hostageship, and the notions of kinship that it engendered were faint and subsidiary.

Rome's interpretation of its Arsacid residents therefore set the stage for pragmatic misunderstanding with Parthia over the meaning of their circulation. To the degree that the Romans saw the Arsacids as foster-children, they would have analogized them with the *alumni* of the Roman family who were typically lower in social status than their fosterers. A patronal fosterage view would have led the Romans to conclusions about the Arsacids that were diametrically opposed to those of the Parthians, whose operational model was cliental. But even more dissonance stemmed from the dominant classification of the Arsacids of Rome as hostages, a category of foreigner that Roman triumphalism coded as a type of imperial subject. To the east of the Euphrates, the Arsacids could rejoice that the Roman emperor had accepted Parthian suzerainty by assuming the role of a fosterer. To the west, the Romans could celebrate the surrender of hostages from an eastern imperial neighbor long recalcitrant, but finally, it now appeared, brought to bay. Through fortuitous incomprehension, both sides could claim the upper hand in the transfers that brought Arsacid dynasts to the heart of Roman power.