



INTERNATIONAL HELLENIC UNIVERSITY  
SCHOOL OF HUMANITIES  
MA IN BLACK SEA CULTURAL STUDIES

## **TOPICS IN THE ANCIENT HISTORY OF THE BLACK SEA REGION**

**The Kingdom of Pontos under Mithridates Eupator (2<sup>nd</sup> – 1<sup>st</sup> c. B.C.)  
(until the outbreak of the First Mithridatic War)**



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## Prologue

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The daring and charismatic leadership of Mithridates Eupator<sup>1</sup> has been studied extensively by scholars between the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries but especially in the last few years and it will long continue to be in the future thanks to the international nature of the subject<sup>2</sup>. A wide variety of biographical articles were devoted to Mithridates, as the interest, in the course of the centuries, in historical personalities increased. Only under his sovereign the petty kingdom of Pontus had been transformed into an extensive territorial state and a soldierly power capable of challenging the strength of Rome during the Late Republic. His expansionist policies brought almost the whole of the Black Sea region under his sway<sup>3</sup>. However, despite the fact that ancient written reports on Mithridates are not few, as those of Plutarch's and Appian's, no biography of him has been survived from antiquity<sup>4</sup>.

The majority of the literary sources are roman, depicting the picture of Mithridates from the perspective of his foes and his defeated opponents, recommending, however, one of the most distinguished figures in the Late Hellenistic world. Even though the available ancient written texts remain unchanged, the enigmatic character and personality of the Pontic king present clearly the qualitative and quantitative differences in reception of his achievements<sup>5</sup>. The policy of Mithridates is today a field of "scholarly wars", in which every scholar indulges his own subjective opinion. Although he failed to defeat Rome -he earned only one major battle against the Roman army at Zela in 67 B.C.-, Mithridates was long remembered as a symbol of uncompromising personality.

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<sup>1</sup> When the cult of Dionysos became a royal one the king of the Pontus began calling himself Mithridates Eupator Dionysos. The cult of the god was used by the king in his policy, as is reflected on coins and terracotas. This epithet could have been adopted by Mithridates after the expansions in Asia Minor, depicting himself as the protector and liberator of the Greeks by identifying him with Dionysos, who was widely worshipped as Soter. S. Saprykin 2009, 250. The title Eupator means born of a noble father.

<sup>2</sup> Summerer 2009, 15.

<sup>3</sup> However, until now very few attempts have been done in order to understand and to strengthen awareness of the Pontic kingdom as unity and not as separate unattached parts.

<sup>4</sup> Marek 2009, 35.

<sup>5</sup> The image of Mithridates has been altered through the centuries from positive to negative and vice versa. Perhaps, the differential receptions have to do with ideological reasons. S. Summerer 2009, 15-34.

Until now, almost all the previous researches on the Pontic kingdom have focused on the foreign policy of Mithridates VI, for which the ancient written sources offer a munificent amount of information. In contrast, almost nothing is known about the internal organization of the royal power. Issues, which have to do with the exercise of the royal control in the different individual parts of the empire and also with the nature of the relationships between the king and the cities as well as with the settlement patterns have not yet been raised on an extensive scale. Only the continuation of a properly planned archaeological and historical research can provide new materials, which will make it possible to expand our picture of the history of Pontic kingdom under Mithridates VI Eupator and to specify its detailed features more accurately<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> One of the main problems in studying the history of the kingdom of Pontus is the limited scale of archaeological excavations and surveys carried out in southern Black Sea (modern Turkey) and even the acquainted monuments have till nowadays not been studied to their full range. S. Højte 2009, 10.

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### Features of Pontus region

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In order to approximate not only the historical context in which Mithridates acted but also to investigate safety the aspects of his character and personality and to achieve an assiduous and impartial valuation of his proceeding, it is necessary a short reference to the history of the kingdom of Pontus as a geographical unity and as a political entity.

The name Pontus in antiquity was applied to the coastal region and its mountainous hinterland on the southern part of the Black Sea area. The extend of the region varied through the ages, but generally it extended from the borders of Colchis (Phasis River in the modern Georgia) until well into Paphlagonia in the west (Heraclea Pontica in modern Turkey), despite the fact that some historians and geographers delineate the western borders at the mouth of the Halys River, with varying amount of hinterland<sup>7</sup>.

The kingdom of Pontus was divided into two district areas, with the coastal region being divided from the mountainous inland area by the Pontic Alps, which ran parallel to the coast. The region was rich in timber, fishes and olive trees, as well as in iron, silver and copper. However, the division between coast and interior was also reflects a sharp cultural division. In the seashore the Greek element was prevailed over all others and the main occupation of its inhabitants was the sea trade. In contrast, the interior was occupied by the Anatolian Cappadocians and Paphlagonians, who had been ruled by an Iranian aristocracy, whose beginnings went back to the Persian Empire<sup>8</sup>. In this way, it is understood that the Pontic culture and civilization was a synthesis of Greek and Iranian elements, and despite the fact that the Greek was

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<sup>7</sup> McGing 1986, 4-6.

<sup>8</sup> By the time of Mithridates VI the native Anatolian population was steady and integrated, with the exception of some tribes, which were still wild (Strabo, *Geography*, XII.3.18) and had to be under the continuous control of Eupator (Strabo, *Geography*, XII.3.28).

the official language of the kingdom during the Hellenistic period, Anatolian languages continued to be spoken in the interior<sup>9</sup>.

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## The kingdom of Pontus during the succession of power<sup>10</sup>

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After the death of Alexander the Great began the bloody combat for succession between his enemies and confidants. In the following period of the Diadochi, a great number of independent states rose in Asia Minor, including the kingdoms of Bithynia's, Cappadocia's and Pontus's. During the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C. the region of Pontus was part of the Persian Satrapy of Cappadocia (Katpatuka) under the power of *Mithridates of Cius*<sup>11</sup>, who have been followed by his son *Ariobarzanes II* (363-337 B.C.), who became a strong ally of Athens and revolted against Artaxerxes II. However, Ariobarzanes was betrayed by his son *Mithridates II of Cius* (337-302 B.C.), who remained ruler of the region, even after Alexander's conquests, but he was vassal to Antigonus I Monophthalmus. Mithridates was killed by Antigonus in 302 B.C., whose worry began to grow of Mithridates son, also called Mithridates (281-266 B.C.), known as *Mithridates I Ctistes* (The Founder)<sup>12</sup>, planning to kill him.

Meanwhile, Antigonus' own son Demetrius I Poliorcetes, who had formed a close friendship with the young noble, warned Mithridates, who finally escaped to the east, visiting, at the beginning, the city of Cimiata in Paphlagonia and later Amasia in Cappadocia. He succeeded to rule until 266 B.C., recognizing himself as king of the state, which was extending in his times between the northern Cappadocia and the eastern Paphlagonia, cementing his family's authority across his kingdom. After the short reign of his son, *Ariobarzanes* (266-250 B.C.), who have lacked the ambition of his father, the grandson of the former, *Mithridates II* (250-189 B.C.) became king. He

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<sup>9</sup> To present a Greek face to the Greek world and an Anatolian one to the native world was one of the typical policies, which have been adopted by the last kings of Pontus, and a task completed with particular skill by Mithridates VI. S. McGing 1986, 11.

<sup>10</sup> The ancient written sources are practically absent to the earlier history of the Pontic kingdom and even the succession of kings is still a matter of debate. S. Gabelko 2009, 47-62, for a fresh look of the dynastic history.

<sup>11</sup> There are obvious difficulties in this hypothesis, as the fact how Cius, which was located on the south shores of Propontis, could avail as the base for empire building in Pontus, far to the East. S. Bosworth – Wheatley 1998, 155.

<sup>12</sup> Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History*, XX.111.4.

proved himself to be a competent ruler, defeating and driving out by his forces the hostile hordes of Galatians, receiving assistance from Heraclea Pontica, which was at this time at war with the Galatians. He married the Seleucid princess Laodice and was given the land of Phrygia as a dowry by her brother Seleucus II Callinicus, despite the fact that during the War of the Brothers Mithridates defeated Seleucus, killing almost twenty thousands of his soldiers. Years later he gave his daughter to Antiochus III, in order to establish stronger ties with the Seleucid Empire. The sources do not include various references for the following years after the death of Mithridates II, when his son *Mithridates III* ruled (220-198/88 B.C.). It is reasonable to assume that not only his reign was fairly quiet but also that the Seleucid Empire no longer posed a threat to the Pontic kingdom.

The most successfully extensive policy against the Greek coastal cities was adopted by *Pharnakes I*, who ruled between 189-159 B.C. After a common war with Prusias of Bithynia against Eumenes of Pergamon in 188 B.C., he conquered Sinope<sup>13</sup>, Cotyora, Phanarcia and Trapezus, controlling most of the southern Black Sea coastline. He was the first, who established friendly relations and contacts not only with the cities of the Crimean Peninsula, as Chersonesus, but also with the Western part of the Black Sea region, as Odessus. His measures laid to the foundation of a system of uniting the Black Sea region into a financial, economic and by extension into a political framework.

His successor, *Mithridates IV Philopator/Philadelphus*, adopted a peaceful pro-Roman policy, sending a body of troops to aid the Roman ally Attalus II of Pergamon against forces Prusias II of Bithynia in 155 B.C. His nephew, *Mithridates V Euergetes*, due to the empowering of his kingdoms alliance with the Romans, who sent ships and soldiers to aid them in the Third Punic War, was awarded the land of Phrygia<sup>14</sup>. He married Laodice, the daughter of the Paphlagonia's king, Pylamenes,

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<sup>13</sup> Mithridates II made plans to conquer Sinope in 220 B.C., but the intervention of Rhodes obstructed him. However, Pharnake I in 183 B.C. brought Sinope into the Pontic kingdom, despite of its strong defences (Strabo, *Geography*, XII.3.11), transforming her in the capital of the kingdom. S. McGing 1986, 4.

<sup>14</sup> It is worthy to highlight that the predecessors of Mithridates Eupator never struck vast amounts of coins and did almost nothing to encourage trade, since the coinages, that they issued, were intended for limited purposes, most probably military ones. However, Mithridates VI in his attempts to emphasize the propagandistic value of his iconography he multiplied the coinage production. S. Callataj 2009, 87-88.

forcing him to bequeath his realm to Pontus. Applying philhellenic tendencies, his capital Sinope was home to a Hellenistic court.

After his death and because both of his sons, *Mithridates VI* and *Mithridates Chrestus* were underage, the region came under the regency of his wife Laodice as regent, who favored, obviously, her younger son. Surviving from a suspicious riding accident, Mithridates VI escaped in the Pontic court, until 113 B.C., when he returned to Sinope, overthrowing his mother and killing his brother<sup>15</sup>. Mithridates took the control of a kingdom, located on the eastern half of the southern shores of the Black Sea region. The coastal line included Greek cities, while the inland of the country had a Persian aristocracy and a Paphlagonian or Cappadocian population. During his reign, he came up against three of the main representatives of the Roman Republic: Sulla, Lucullus and Pompey Magnus. Also, he was the first to utilize the philhellenism as a form of propaganda, exploited the dissatisfaction of the Greek population that lived under the Roman authority. Moreover, Mithridates claimed descend from both Alexander the Great and the Persian king Dareios<sup>16</sup>, presenting himself both as philhellene king and as righteous successor to the Persian Empire<sup>17</sup>. However, despite all of his many talents he was renewedly defeated by the Romans in the Mithridatic Wars and finally his son *Pharnaces II* and his soldiery turned against him and in 63 B.C. he committed suicide.

Pharnaces II sent an embassy to Pompey with the offers of submission in order to secure his position as a king and to bring peace to his kingdom. He, also, sent the body of his father to be at the disposal of Pompey, as proof of his candidness. Pompey granted Pharnaces the Bosporan kingdom as an attachment to his own. In 49 B.C., during the civil war between Pompey and Caesar, whilst Romans were busy with this, Pharnaces seizing the opportunity decided to conquer Colchis and parts of

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<sup>15</sup> Appian, *Mithridatic Wars*, XII.16.112.

<sup>16</sup> Justinus, *Epitome*, XXXVIII.7.1.

<sup>17</sup> The Persian character of the kingdom is highlighted, among the others, by the temple of the Persian deities (Anaitis, Omanus and Anadatus) at Zela, where the inhabitants of Pontus made their most sacred dedications. S Strabo, *Geography*, XI.8.4, XII.3.37. Price – Trel 1977, 102. McGing 1986, 9. Sökmen 2009, 281-282. The claim to descent from Achaemenid royalty was a propaganda, devised to give the family added luster and nobility. McGing 2009, 205. Mithridates, also, used to sacrifice in the manner of the Persian kings at Pasargadae. Appian, *Mithridatic Wars*, XII.9.66, XII.10.70. However, in Saprykin's opinion the Greek element was always the strongest and the most widespread, and religious beliefs and practices had primarily a Greek audience. A complete study of cults and religion in the Pontic kingdom and ideological propaganda closely connected with royal dynastic policy is still lacked today. S. Saprykin 2009, 249-276.



Armenia. However, despite the fact that he was defeated by the Roman army, he continued to organize plans for a generalized revolution, until he was swiftly defeated by Ceasar at the Battle of Zela, leading the famous quote “Veni, Vidi, Vici”. Pharnaces fled back to the Bosporan kingdom and managed to congregate a small army of Scythians and Sarmatians, before he was killed in a battle. After his death his son Darius was placed as a dummy king of Pontus by Marcus Antonius.

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## **Expansionist policy of Mithridates’ in the Black Sea and in Asia Minor**

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Mithridates VI, continuing his father’s expansionist policy, crossed in 115/14 B.C. the Black Sea and intervened in a conflict between the Bosporan kingdom and its northern neighbour, the Scythians, who were threatening the Greek cities of the region<sup>18</sup>. Mithridates dispatched a troop under the power of Diophantus, son of Asclepiodorus, a citizen of Sinope, and during two separate expeditions over at least three years the Scythians were defeated<sup>19</sup>. The result of this intervention was that the Crimean Peninsula became part of the kingdom of Pontus<sup>20</sup> and Mithridates became their protector against any nomad raining, without, however, to threaten directly the Roman interests<sup>21</sup>.

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<sup>18</sup> The Greek colonists of the northern Black Sea from the second half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century to the early 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. had been under a strong pressure from the Scythians. In order to react even more in this pressure the consummation of the Bosporan colonies into a military and religious union was a reaction. The later must have been ruling in Panticapaeum, and was in charge of the economic and political development of Panticapaion’s community at the expense of its neighbors in the Crimean Peninsula. That early league was headed at the beginning by the dynasty of the Archaeanactids (480 B.C.) and later by the dynasty of Spartocids, who reigned for almost 300 years up to the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century B.C. S. Maslennikov 2001, 249 and Saprykin 2006, 275.

<sup>19</sup> Strabo, *Geography*, VII.4.3-4. The fortified settlement Kuru Bas, east of Theodosia, on the boundaries of the Bosporan kingdom appear that a Mithridatic garrison was established in this region in order to control the land route from Theodosia to the Crimean Mountains. S. Højte 2009, 102-103. Gavrilov 2009, 335-336.

<sup>20</sup> The entire Black Sea region was turned into a single administrative unit, the center of which was located in Pantikapaion. S. Molev 2009, 326.

<sup>21</sup> Olbrycht 2004, 337-338. While there were material benefits from this expansion in the northern Black Sea region -Strabo refers that the annual tribute from Crimea and adjoining territories was 180.000 medimni and 200 talents of silver- the major significance of this Euxine Empire for Mithridates was military manpower. S. Appian, *Mithridatic War*, X.69. However, Rome had shown interest about this area even earlier. In the treaty between Phanarkes and Chersonesos in 179 or 155

His successful policy was continued by adding the coast around Trapezous and Colchis and parts of western Armenia in his kingdom<sup>22</sup>. The sum of these conquests gave to Mithridates the ruling of almost the entire circuit of the Black Sea region, with the exception of Bithynia and Thrace in the south west, areas which remained outside his command. However, the conquest of Paphlagonia in 108/07 B.C., which was inherited and shared with the king of Bithynia Nicomedes III Euergetes, was the fact that activates the involvement of the Roman Senate in the affairs of the region.

Already from 133 B.C., when Attalus of Pergamum died without an inheritor, Rome had gained an Asian Empire. In this way, Pergamum, on the western shores of Asia Minor, with Cilicia, on the southern coast of Asia Minor, became Roman provinces, having a number of neighbors in common. In the east was Cappadocia between Cilicia and Pontus, while to the west of Pontus was Paphlagonia, and then at the north-western corner of Asia Minor was Bithynia, which shared a common border with the Roman Province. In the middle of all these political formations were the Celts of Galatia. Any try by Mithridates to expand his territorial region into these areas would certain attract the attention of the Romans<sup>23</sup>.

Unsurprisingly, the subjection of Paphlagonia was not acceptable to the Senate, and the two kings had to blow through the area they had snatched. Meanwhile, Mithridates was not dissuaded and in 101 B.C. he intervened in Cappadocia, since he had a personal interest in the activities in that kingdom, as his sister Laodice had been married the king Ariarathes VI (ruled 130-116 B.C.). His first act in this area was to arrange, through Gordius, a Cappadocian representative of the aristocratic elite, the murder of the king, with the purpose of ensuring that his sister would be able to control the kingdom more easily as regent for her own son,

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B.C., both parties tried to create a friendship with the Romans and do nothing in contrast to their ambitions. S. Højte 2005, 139.

<sup>22</sup> Todua 2013, 416.

<sup>23</sup> The written sources offer little information about the administrative organization of the Pontic kingdom. Probably, independent self-governing poleis seem to have not played a significant role, without, however, this meaning that Pontus was devoid of cities. It is reasonable to suppose that the Pontic kingdom was divided into individual *strategiai*, like the Cappadocian kingdom. S. Højte 2009, 103-105.

Ariarathes VII<sup>24</sup>, an arrangement which lasted until 102 B.C., when Nicomedes III got into Cappadocia and married Laodice<sup>25</sup>.

The reaction of Mithridates was direct, sending in his army, expelling Nicomedes and restoring his nephew Ariarathes VII. However, in the following year Mithridates turned against his nephew, but at a pre-battle meeting the king of Cappadocia was murdered and finally the fight was averted. Subsequently, Mithridates placed one of his sons on the throne, Ariarathes IX, with Gordius as regent, an arrangement which lasted for about five years<sup>26</sup>.

Both Mithridates and Nicomedes in their try to deal with the Romans sent embassies to Rome. Mithridates in 101 B.C. sent an embassy in his attempt to gain recognition of his requests for Paphlagonia, while Nicomedes undertook to gain Roman recognition for his requirement of a part of Cappadocia. Although the interest of Romans began to increase, they were not yet ready to interpose. Only after a Cappadocian revolt on 97 B.C. the Senate decided to intervene for the first time with an effective manner<sup>27</sup>.

The revolutionists invited the brother of Ariarathes VII to be their king, but he was defeated and by extension expelled by Mithridates. In order to argue their case both Nicomedes and Mithridates sent embassies to Romans, who responded by ordering them to secede from their possessions respectively in Cappadocia and Paphlagonia. The Cappadocians, who gained their autonomy, while Mithridates withdrew from Paphlagonia and the praetor Lucius Cornelius Sulla placed Ariobarzanes I Philoromaeus on its throne<sup>28</sup>.

For almost the first twenty years of his reign, Mithridates adopted a very precautional policy in his dealing with the Rome, avoiding armed conflicts of long range. He could have very easily avoided ever conflicting with Rome if focused his exterior policy only to the east or north, a behavior which followed at the start of his reign. However, two drastic changes affected his expansionist tendencies,

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<sup>24</sup> Justinus, *Epitome*, XXXVIII.1.1.

<sup>25</sup> Sherwin-White 1977, 173.

<sup>26</sup> Dmitriev 2006, 285-286.

<sup>27</sup> Olbrycht 2009, 172.

<sup>28</sup> The real reason for the Sulla's expedition was not only to reinstate Ariobarzanes but also to check up Eupator's intentions. S. Olbrycht 2008, 277. In addition, an essential observation is that Sulla's actions in the region were the first instance since the peace of Apameia in 188 B.C. of a Roman military intervention in Anatolia. S. Olbrycht 2009, 173.

strengthening even more his pursuits. From now on, the dispute with Rome, which will last for the rest of Mithridates life, became inevitable.

In 96/95 B.C. Tigranes I became king of Armenia, allying himself with Mithridates, while in 94 B.C., when Nicomedes III of Bithynia died was succeeded by his son Nicomedes IV Philopator, the king of Pontus wanted to install Philopator's brother Socrates Chrestus in the royal throne, a fact which was unacceptable to Rome<sup>29</sup>. Possibly, Mithridates, believing that Rome would be too occupied to intervene in east, as was involved in a civil war, organized an extensive project of conquests<sup>30</sup>.

However, the Romans feared that Mithridates, whose empire consisted of all the countries surrounding the Black Sea, would become even more powerful if a helpless person would be king in Bithynia. Because of this, in 90 B.C. the Senate sent Manius Aquilius to Asia Minor in order to restore Nicomedes in Bithynia and Ariobarzanes to Cappadocia, punishing simultaneously the disobedient king of Pontus, who in turn decided to retaliate and in 89 B.C. declared the war against the Rome<sup>31</sup>.

The battles against Rome and his initial successes had proved his abilities as a king in the eyes of his army, his court and evenly importantly in the Greek cities of Asia Minor, who obviously received him as liberator freeing them from the Roman yoke<sup>32</sup>. He stood forth as a ruler of an extensive kingdom, who was allied to the king of Armenia, against Rome, which was troubled by the instability that followed the Social War<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>29</sup> Appian, *Mithridatic Wars*, XII.2.10, emphasizes that the actions in Bithynia and Cappadocia were simultaneous.

<sup>30</sup> Dmitriev 2006, 290.

<sup>31</sup> McGing 1986, 79-80. Olbrycht 2008, 278. Olbrycht 2009, 176.

<sup>32</sup> Appian, *Mithridatic Wars*, XII.3.21. In addition, in Athens influential men now turned towards him, facing him as the power that will free the Hellenic world from the Roman rule. S. Appian, *Mithridatic Wars*, XII.5.28-29.

<sup>33</sup> Majbom-Madsen 2009, 191.

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## Shades of Mithridates' policy of expansion.

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Modern scholars described Mithridates either as an oriental despotic profile, who, due to his lust for power and desire to enhance Pontic influence in Asia Minor, caused the outbreak of war in 89 B.C., or as the Hellenistic king, who fought against Rome in an attempt to liberate the Greek world from the Roman yoke<sup>34</sup>. The image of Mithridates' as an Eastern despot, who attacked the civilized West or as a Greek combating the barbaric and repressive regime to liberate the ingenious and cultured Greek from their rule, has been a common assumption throughout modern bibliography<sup>35</sup>.

As a natural consequence of Mithridates' policy expansion was that the war between Rome and Pontus to be almost inescapable. The increment of Mithridates' power in order to challenge the Romans in conjunction with the continuously increasing of the Roman pressure under the Greek cities in Asia, arming him with an excuse and power to step into the role of a rescuer king, who appeared to liberate the Greek population from the antidemocratic Romans. It is unquestionable right that Mithridates was ambitious and that had been influenced by an extraordinary desire for power and a disposal to enlarge his kingdom as other Hellenistic kings.

Moreover, during the first 20 years of his rule, he succeeded to transform Pontus from a small and weak kingdom in the central and northern part of Anatolia with close links to Rome, to a large autonomous authority, controlling not only the majority of the lands of central Anatolia, but also the north-western parts of the Black Sea region. However, the question which remains unanswered is, if Mithridates in his strategical plans on purpose aimed for a war with Rome that would end its power and sovereignty in Asia Minor<sup>36</sup>.

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<sup>34</sup> Perhaps, a decisive role in the differential consideration of the Mithridates' ambitions played the available ancient written literary sources, which are divided between Cicero's picture of Mithridates as the king who, spurred by a desire for capture, fought Romans (Cicero, *For Lucius Murena*, 11), and Plutarch's description of a victim of an emulous Senate (Plutarch, *Comparison of Cimon and Lucullus*, 5.1 and 5.6).

<sup>35</sup> Majbom-Madsen 2009, 192.

<sup>36</sup> Majbom-Madsen 2009, 192-193.

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## Explanation of Pontic policies between 115-89 B.C.

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The annexation of his neighboring kingdoms -Paphlagonia, Cappadocia, Galatia and Bithynia- brought Mithridates inevitably on a conflict procedure with Rome. His expansionist attempts, between his incorporation and the outbreak of the First Mithridatic War, should be explained only as an act arising from the ideology of Hellenistic kings in their need to enlarge as much as possible their domains. In addition, his imperial policy was not intended to a final encounter with Rome, since Mithridates orientated his conquests towards areas where Rome had few interests for objecting<sup>37</sup>.

The first annexations of Armenia and Colchis were of little interest to Rome just as the Mithridates' succor to the Greek cities in the north and north-western parts of the Black Sea, which caused an almost impalpability disturbance in Rome<sup>38</sup>. The enlargement of the command of the Pontic kingdom carried out step by step, placing areas under Mithridates' control, without any important opposition from Rome. However, any active policy by Mithridates towards Rome would have been impossible, if he had not steadily secured his eastern frontier, including Armenia and Colchis<sup>39</sup>.

The first action of Mithridates, which activated the Roman interests, came in 107 B.C. with the concerted annexation of Paphlagonia by Mithridates and the Bithynian king Nicomedes III, who, unlike the former, did not have the same selections for expanding his possessions. The ancient written sources do not refer in details about the way that these two kings coordinated their actions, but they inform that Mithridates accomplished to further expand his territory and prevent Bithynia's borders coming too near to the center of Pontus<sup>40</sup>.

Rome responded by sending a committee to require a full withdrawal from Paphlagonia, but as she hesitated to demand all this with force, Nicomedes established his son as the king of Paphlagonia, while Mithridates conquered part of Galatia,

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<sup>37</sup> Majbom-Madsen 2009, 194.

<sup>38</sup> This subject, however, remains disputable, since Macedonia's eastern frontier with Thracians was always of significant interest to Rome. S. Kallet-Marx 1995, 223-227.

<sup>39</sup> Olbrycht 2008, 276.

<sup>40</sup> Majbom-Madsen 2009, 194.

adding another territory to his kingdom<sup>41</sup>. The basic reason of Rome's procrastination should be explained as a matter of resources. The wars with Jugurtha in 107 B.C., with the Cimbrians in 104 B.C. and the conflicts in Africa against the German tribes are often seen as the main explanation why Rome avoided to involve into Anatolia and to re-establish the control, opening one more area of instability. These regions, at the moment, were too unimportant for a large-scale military interference for Rome, giving the impression to the Anatolian kings that she was either unwilling or unable to intervene, at least as long as her own province in Asia was secured<sup>42</sup>.

In 101 B.C., when Nicomedes married Mithridates' sister Laodice, the last removed the Bithynians and took the control of the whole Cappadocia, a country which was to play a special role in the development of Eupator's empire<sup>43</sup>. The kingdom of Pontus could not be able to achieve the status of a local superpower, without conquering Cappadocia, which was a major state in eastern Anatolia<sup>44</sup>. Even in this case, Rome did not reply to Mithridates expansion, until 97 B.C. when Cappadocians revolted against the Pontic rule. After that, both Nicomedes III and Mithridates sent an embassy to the Senate, in order to support their rights, giving Rome the ability to resume her demands for a complete revocation from both Cappadocia and Paphlagonia. That settlement of the pendings reflects that Rome was still regarded as the leading authority in Anatolia. In addition, the fact that Mithridates felt the need to have his annexation of Cappadocia approved in Rome, suggests that he had no purposes of taking part in a dispute with the strongest soldierly power in the region. His attempts were more likely to maximize the extension of his kingdom as far as possible, without to challenge Roman interests to the point of war<sup>45</sup>.

The weakness of Bithynia, after the death of Nicomedes in 94 B.C., the alliance with the king of Armenia, Tigranes<sup>46</sup>, in combination with the outbreak of the Social War in Rome gave to Mithridates the control of the evolution in Anatolia. By the late 90's B.C. the kingdom of Pontus had become a strong power, capable to

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<sup>41</sup> McGing 2009, 208.

<sup>42</sup> Majbom-Madsen 2009, 195.

<sup>43</sup> Mouritsen 1998, 136.

<sup>44</sup> Olbrycht 2009, 164.

<sup>45</sup> Majbom-Madsen 2009, 195.

<sup>46</sup> The new alliance, which was established through the marriage of Mithridates' daughter Kleopatra with Tigranes (Justinus, *Epitome*, XXXVIII.3.2), will remain active for many years. S. Olbrycht 2009, 169.

struggle Rome<sup>47</sup>. Mithridates, in his attempt to expand even more the territory of his kingdom, sent Socrates, son of Nicomedes III, into Bithynia to expel Nicomedes IV and in Cappadocia Armenian army corps in order to replace the king<sup>48</sup>.

This strategy, one more time, underlines the policy of Mithridates, who did not want to challenge Rome too openly. However, the question that remains to be answered is still, whether he knew or not that by adding Bithynia and Cappadocia in his kingdom, regions which had Rome's support, he could cause the Roman rage. Admittedly, Mithridates tried to use what he believed to be a weak moment for Rome in order to achieve his expansionist policy. Additionally, it is essential to refer that he did not carry through a raid on Asia, until he was attacked by the Roman commission, despite the fact that he knew that the Social War had weakened Rome. Moreover, he tried to avoid the approaching conflict by drawing back his troops from his new domains, when Rome was ready to intervene in Anatolia<sup>49</sup>. But he did also continue to raise the stakes. Thus, it was simply a pragmatic decision, as he found that he had come very close to the limits of what was possible without an armed conflict<sup>50</sup>. In reality, he wanted war, but a war on his terms, which were that Rome should be seen to be the invader and Pontus the aggrieved party<sup>51</sup>.

The kingdom of Pontus was indeed prepared for a generalized conflict against Rome, since more than 250.000 soldiers were at Mithridates disposal, but he wanted to have an adequate and pretty sufficient reason for war<sup>52</sup>. However, to give Mithridates the whole responsibility for beginning this war is too simpleminded. In contrast, the search for causes for the outbreak of the First Mithridatic War has to be focused on and to the Roman committee, which had been headed by Manius Aquillius and Cassius, who never looked for a peaceful solution. Instead, they challenged Mithridates to begin the war, while the Pontic withdrawal from Bithynia and

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<sup>47</sup> The dense monumental presence of Mithridates in the Greek centers of the Hellenistic period would produce information about his royal ideology, besides those stressed by the written sources. In 102/101 B.C. a heroon dedicated to Mithridates Eupator was erected on Delos by a private individual, Helianax, reflecting, among the others, the presence of Parthian envoys at the court of Mithridates'. The building was intended as propagandistic monument for the Pontic king, demonstrating his power, which had been documented by international links. S. Kreuz 2009, 134-139. Olbrycht 2009, 167-168.

<sup>48</sup> Majbom-Madsen 2009, 196. Olbrycht 2009, 172.

<sup>49</sup> Majbom-Madsen 2009, 197.

<sup>50</sup> McGing 2009, 209.

<sup>51</sup> McGing 2009, 210.

<sup>52</sup> Appian, *Mithridatic Wars*, XII.3.17, who refers 250.000 infantry, 50.000 cavalry, 400 ships and 130 chariots.



Cappadocia had started<sup>53</sup>, a clear evidence that Rome had lost patience and would not encourage any more Mithridates' provocation<sup>54</sup>.

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## Epilogue

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Mithridates was not the aggressor and naïve person, that modern scholars have believed<sup>55</sup>. In contrast, he was more a representative compliant king of a Hellenistic state, who was influenced by both his own ambitions and local expectations to enlarge his kingdom as far as possible, without engaging in a war with Romans, until the last attacked his interests. He presented himself as heir to the empires of Darius and Alexander the Great<sup>56</sup>. It is essential to underline that Mithridates was not a victim of the Roman imperialism or the ambitions of Roman magistrates, who pursued a political career in Roman Senate<sup>57</sup>. He chose a policy, an important part of which was, initially, the avoidance of the wars, trying to balance the realities that an independent kingdom should face when confronted by a superior authority, as the Rome was. In addition, Mithridates' conquests in Anatolia were clearly against the Roman claims, particularly from the time he attacked the weak kingdoms controlled by the Roman nobility and conquered Bithynia and turned his interests towards the boundaries of the Roman Empire. So, the vital, unanswered question is, who started it all<sup>58</sup>? In this conflict neither side was an innocent victim<sup>59</sup>.

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<sup>53</sup> Majbom-Madsen 2009, 198-199.

<sup>54</sup> McGing 2009, 209.

<sup>55</sup> McGing 1986, vii.

<sup>56</sup> At the beginning of the First Mithridatic War, he lodged at an inn, where Alexander the Great had once stayed. S. Appian, *Mithridatic Wars*, XII.3.20. Mithridates VI extended his propaganda from defender of Greeks to the great liberator of the Greek world, translating the Romans into barbarians, in the same sense as was the Persian Empire in the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. and during Alexander's campaign. Moreover, it is interesting to note that the similarities between the Alexander and Mithridates portraits should not be considered only as a random fact. S. Ballesteros-Pastor 2009, 217.

<sup>57</sup> Majbom-Madsen 2009, 191-202, refers that some Roman senators were ready to further their careers by using every means and the acts of the Roman commission, which have been sent in Anatolia in 89 B.C., had crucial impact on events.

<sup>58</sup> McGing 2009, 204.

<sup>59</sup> McGing 2009, 213.

## CHAPTER II

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Marcus Junianus Justinus, *Epitome of the Philippic History of Pompeius Trogus*, XXXVIII.1.1, 3.2, 7.1, 8.1.

Plutarch, *Comparison of Cimon and Lucullus*, 5.1, 5.6.

Strabo, *Geography*, VII.4.3-4, XI.8.4, XII.3.11, 3.18, 3.28, 3.37.

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### Acronyms

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BSS: Black Sea Studies

CP: Colloquia Pontica

JHS: Journal of Hellenic Studies

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