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Pompey, Theophanes and the Contest for Empire

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Abstract: This paper outlines a new framework for the historical study of Roman imperialism in the East as a dialogue between the empire and local elites. It is argued that Pompey created in his representation a persona of himself that Near Eastern nobles considered legitimate. This representation ultimately helped him to stabilise Roman hegemony over Armenia, which had already developed into a contested borderland with the Parthians. From the fragments aligned with the lost account of Theophanes, there is a strong indication that Alexander was the dominating feature in Pompey's representation in the East. This applies in particular to Pompey's presentation of the so-called 'Transcaucasian campaign'. In the course of this campaign, the Romans approached the northern limits of the world, which allowed Pompey to claim universalism by using the myths that were woven around Alexander. Universalism had been at the heart of the discourse on empire that prevailed in the Near East during the first millennium BCE and, therefore, was crucial to any imperial formation in the Near East that preceded the Romans, especially to Alexander, his successors, and Rome's eastern enemies.

Keywords: Pompey, Theophanes, Alexander, Roman Empire, Parthia, Transcaucasia, elites, Hellenistic East

It is generally assumed among scholars that the Roman conquest of the Hellenistic Near East was heavily embroidered with the legends woven around the character of Alexander the Great.¹ In late Republican and early Imperial Rome, Alexander was not regarded as a fossilised legend from a distant past, but rather his achievements comprised the discursive apparatus for the Romans to measure their imperial success.² However remarkable Alexander's conquest may have been in the eyes of the

¹ E.g., Bosworth (1999), 2–5; 15; Dueck (2012,) 35; Welch and Mitchell (2013), 83–89.

² See the overviews provided by Nabel (2018); Wallace (2018). See also, Green (1978) and Spencer (2002), 9–11, examining the modes and frameworks for Roman meditations about Alexander.

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Romans, the myths surrounding him were not the ideological basis for their imperial expansion. This especially applies to Pompey's conquest of the Near East, as contemporary authors already counted Rome's most formidable general among the greatest admirers of the Macedonian conqueror.³ While there may be abundant evidence for Pompey's association with Alexander, his intentions in doing so are only poorly understood. Therefore, modern historians are still debating whether his imitation of Alexander was either the result of personal motivation or a political instrument.⁴ A dogmatic answer to this question cannot be provided based solely on the available sources. Despite the lack of clarity in this regard, it is nevertheless interesting to note that in Theophanes of Mytilene, Pompey found a writer who promoted an Alexandrian image of him.⁵ Much of his life is shrouded in mystery. We know that Theophanes was a Greek intellectual from Mytilene who became an intimate of Pompey, a Roman citizen, and later an influential politician.⁶ Although Theophanes' historical production is almost entirely lost and the surviving fragments of his works are difficult to contextualise in terms of situation and intention, two reasons qualify them to be regarded as important sources for the study of Pompey's self-representation. Firstly, Theophanes belonged to the inner circle of Pompey's *amici*.⁷ Secondly, he joined Pompey on his campaign to the Near East.⁸ Thus, it seems plausible to assume that the image of Pompey in his account was that which the general promoted about himself.⁹

When speaking about Alexander and Pompey, we should bear in mind that in late Republican Rome, drawing links between oneself and Alexander was a popular phenomenon. Since the first century BCE, it took on the form of a literary motif in

3 Sall. *Hist.* 3.88: *Sed Pompeius a prima adulescentia sermone fautorum similem fore se credens Alexandro regi, facta consultaque eius quidem aemul[at]us erat.* 'But Pompey, believing from his earliest youth, thanks to the flattery of his supporters, that he would be like King Alexander, was an emulator of that man's deeds and intentions' (Trans. Loeb). Modern historians are not free from similar judgments. For a collection of related statements found in secondary literature, see Christ (2004), 201–203.

4 Literature on this issue is too vast to be cited here in detail. Excellent overviews on the debate are Engster (2011), 200–206; Welch and Mitchell (2013); Nabel (2018), 209.

5 Theophanes of Mytilene = *BNJ* 188. See Santangelo (2015), esp. 13; 41; 112.

6 Gold (1985); Santangelo (2015), 1–5.

7 On Theophanes in particular, see Santangelo (2018). On *amicitiae* in the late Republic, see Rollinger (2019).

8 *BNJ* 188 T2 (= Strabo 11.5.1): Θεοφάνης ... ὁ συστρατεύσας τῷ Πομπηίῳ καὶ γενόμενος ἐν τοῖς Ἀλβανοῖς... 'Theophanes ... who accompanied Pompeius' military campaign and reached the Albanoi ...' (Trans. *BNJ*). See Anderson (1963), 29–38; Santangelo (2015), 40 (Theophanes claims expertise in political and military matters).

9 *BNJ* 188 T3b (= Val. Max. 8.14.3); T5c (= Plut. *Pomp.* 49.13–14). See Gold (1985), 321–322, attesting credence to Plut. *Pomp.* 37; 49, where it is said that Theophanes was the 'propagandist' of Pompey; Franklin (2003), 108 ('Pompey's historian').

historiography and public image. For example, almost a century prior to Pompey's conquests, Polybius had created a literary atmosphere in his *Histories* which allowed him to eulogise Scipio Africanus through subtle comparisons with Alexander.¹⁰ Given the plethora of available examples, it comes as no surprise that modern historians have produced abundant literature on Rome's manifold responses to Alexander.¹¹ Concerning the research on Pompey, it might fairly be said that the discussion can be distilled down to a small number of key questions and approaches. The fact that scholars are accustomed to approaching Pompey's association with Alexander solely from a Roman perspective deserves our attention. By doing so, they neglect to consider his potential appeal to the elites of the Near East, which holds great promise for understanding their perspective on Roman imperialism. Roman commanders like Pompey had a long history of communicating with local nobles in the imperial idioms with which they were familiar. Yet, the examples discussed by modern historians are limited to Greece and Asia Minor.¹² Generally, when modern historians address the issue of elites in the Near East, they are analysing the political relationships between Rome and the last Hellenistic kingdoms.¹³ Due to the lack of indigenous sources and the single-minded focus of the Roman accounts, the role of the nobles in the process of empire-building is a less commonly addressed issue in scholarship. Thus, providing a context for the available sources might open new perspectives for studying the Roman conquest of the East, considering it not only as a series of political events but as a process that stimulated cultural dialogue between the empire and subaltern groups.

Irrespective of the challenges involved in the study of Roman responses to prevailing ideas of rulership, it is important to consider that to Near Eastern elites the character of Alexander was rich in meaning at the time of Pompey's advent. These elites commemorated Alexander as a bridge between the relatively distant ancient Near Eastern and the more contemporary Hellenistic past.¹⁴ As argued in recent scholarship, staging oneself as Alexander in the Near East was seen as assuming the role of a ruler who knew how to employ prevailing models of rulership in order to gain legitimacy. Already, Alexander did so with the intention of converting military

¹⁰ Polyb. 10.2–20. See Moore (2019), 19–20.

¹¹ Bosworth (1999) (imperial ideology); Bichler (2014), 1557–1564 (ancient historiography); Erickson (2018) (focus on late Republic); Nabel (2018) (discourse on the East); Wallace (2018) (Hellenistic and Roman discourses).

¹² Dmitriev (2011), *passim*.

¹³ E.g., Millar (1993). See also Sherwin-White (1984), 235–261; Kallet-Marx (1996), 323–335; Santangelo (2007), 50–66; Van Wijlick (2021), 45–49, 209–233.

¹⁴ Bosworth and Wheatley (1998); Briant (2015); Michels (2017); Shayegan (2017).

hegemony into solid rule.¹⁵ In this context, the possible impact of Pompey's impersonation of Alexander on the local nobles of the Hellenistic East certainly invites discussion.

Examining Pompey's public image during the Transcaucasian campaign in the context of prevailing imperial traditions in the Hellenistic East can significantly enhance our understanding of Roman imperialism. Even though previous scholarship has analysed some aspects of this episode in painfully minute detail, the ideological value of the claim to conquest in the Near East has so far been relatively neglected.¹⁶ The Transcaucasian region had immense symbolic value, given that Near Eastern and Hellenistic empires had already claimed universalism while asserting control over the region. Universalism can be defined as the idea of controlling the entire world and is a concept that obviously represents a theoretical claim rather than a factual reality. It is a characteristic feature of ancient empires to support and assert claims of world domination.¹⁷ Universalism provides legitimation in the worlds of the Near East from the beginning of the first millennium BCE until the conquest of Pompey.¹⁸ Furthermore, there is reason to believe that the Romans had considerable interest in winning over local elites to maintain their rather fragile hegemony over Armenia. Regardless of the success of Roman arms in battle and diplomatic skills, the unbroken influence of the Parthians over the diverse groups of Armenian aristocrats resulted in the transformation of this region into a contested borderland.¹⁹ The situation required the Romans to legitimise their hegemony instead of just using the force of arms to solidify their influence over this area.

In what follows, it will be argued that Pompey's Transcaucasian campaign was a key episode in the account of Theophanes. The historical fragments associated with his work are considered here to be invaluable sources for understanding Pompey's appeal to Hellenistic elites in the East. This argument will be developed by examining Pompey's association with Alexander during the Transcaucasian campaign in the broader context of imperial traditions in the Near East. This will be achieved in two segments. In the first segment, the fragments associated with Theo-

¹⁵ See Briant (2002), 873–876; Spawforth (2012); Haubold (2013), 127–153; Trampedach and Meeus (2020), 9–13; Degen (2022a), 40–51, 409–417.

¹⁶ Studies on the political situation are Greenhalgh (1980), 122–146; Wirth (1983); Chaumont (1984); Sherwin-White (1984), 195–206; Dąbrowa (1989), 67–68; Braund (1996); Dreher (1996); Van Wijlick (2021), 27–41. Bäßler (2019) is an examination of Transcaucasia's topography. Traina (2015, 2021) addresses the issue of Graeco-Roman ethnography of Transcaucasians.

¹⁷ See Biran, Pines and Rüpke (2021); Gehler and Rollinger (2022), 22 ('an ideologically shaped perception of the world'); Degen (2024).

¹⁸ Ancient Near Eastern empires: Pongratz-Leisten (2015), 145–197; Rollinger and Degen (2021). Hellenistic empires: Strootman (2014a, 2014b).

¹⁹ Wirth (1983); Dąbrowa (1989, 2021).

phanes' account will be contextualised against the backdrop of the historiography related to Alexander. Then, the ideological message of Pompey's representation will be analysed in both a Roman and a Near Eastern context. It will be argued that the myths associated with Alexander proved to be a powerful instrument to assert that Pompey had surpassed the deeds of Alexander. This assertion ultimately helped him to put himself in a dominant place in the prevailing discourse on empire. I shall begin by examining the historiographical accounts of the Transcaucasian campaign.

I The campaign of Pompey to Transcaucasia

In the year 66 BCE, when the last threat to Roman power in the East, Mithridates VI of Pontus, fled from Roman armies to the Crimean Bosphorus, Pompey was close to accomplishing the mission with which the Senate had entrusted him.²⁰ Earlier in that year, the Lex Manilia had bestowed upon him *imperium extraordinarium* to fight Mithridates and his Armenian ally, king Tigranes II.²¹ After the hasty departure of Mithridates, Pompey considered the time to be ripe for launching a campaign against Armenia. At this time, the kingdom of Tigranes had already developed into a contested borderland between the Romans on the one side and the Parthian Empire on the other.²² Thus, it seems likely that Pompey wanted to conduct a rapid advance to prevent a preemptive attack by the Parthians since they had previously made attempts to invade Armenia.²³ At this stage, the son of Tigranes II, Tigranes the Younger, revolted against his father and invited the Romans to take control of the kingdom. Unsurprisingly, Tigranes II was temporarily *in extremis* and thus he readily accepted Roman hegemony. Although the younger Tigranes retained control of his realm, things turned out rather differently under the Romans than he had expected when issuing his invitation. While the prince may have counted on the support of some local elites to become a Roman client ruler, Pompey ultimately decided otherwise, with the result that his decisions were not accepted by all Armenian nobles.²⁴

²⁰ On Mithridates' flight, see App. *Mithr.* 15.101–102; Cass. Dio 36.50.1–2; Plut. *Pomp.* 33.9; Strabo 11.2.13, 13.1.55.

²¹ Van Wijlick (2021), 27–29.

²² Dąbrowa (2021), 41–45.

²³ As early as the reign of Mithridates II, the Arsacids had showed interest in Armenia. See Dąbrowa (2021), 43 with references to sources. According to Cass. Dio 36.1.1, the Parthians did not lose interest in Armenia until 66 BCE. See also van Wijlick (2021), 105–125.

²⁴ On the settlements see App. *Mithr.* 15.104–105; Cass. Dio 36.53.3–5; Plut. *Pomp.* 33.9. See van Wijlick (2021), 32–36. As we learn from Cass. Dio 36.50–51 and Plut. *Pomp.* 33.9–34, the Armenian elites were

Transcaucasia, located on the northern frontier of Armenia, remained politically unstable and posed a threat to the Romans. It encompasses the land on the isthmus between the Pontic and Hyrcanian Seas, which roughly corresponds to modern-day Georgia and Azerbaijan. This region was divided by two autonomous kingdoms, with the Iberians in the western half and the Albanians in the eastern half (Strabo 11.3–4). Despite the support of Tigranes II, Roman hegemony over Armenia proved to be ephemeral for two reasons. Firstly, the fall of the kingdom of Armenia transformed its former space of influence into a contested area to which the Romans and Parthians held a claim.²⁵ In other words, Armenia, and particularly its Transcaucasian frontiers, remained contested borderlands in subsequent years.²⁶ These frontiers were crucial for the mobility of people between the northern steppes and the heartland of the Near East.²⁷ Therefore, control of this borderland was important to any political power that aimed to rule Armenia. Secondly, the local elites in Pontus and Armenia were diverse rather than unified, representing different groups of people living in the area. They shared a common, albeit heterogeneous, culture. A major goal for both Mithridates and Pompey had been to win over their favour and so entrench their own power there.²⁸ As far as can be determined, these local nobles had strong ties to both Iranian and Macedonian-Hellenistic cultures.²⁹ Iranian groups were settled in the regions of Pontus, Armenia, and

separated in two camps before the advent of the Romans. See Cass. Dio 36.51.1 on the dissatisfaction of Armenian elites with Tigranes II.

²⁵ Dąbrowa (2021), 46–47; van Wijlick (2021), 36–41; App. *Mithr.* 15.106; Cass. Dio 37.7.2–4.

²⁶ According to Cass. Dio 36.54.1, the Albanian king, Oroeses, thought about supporting the usurpation of Tigranes the Younger against Tigranes II and Rome. On the claims of the Arsacid and Sasanians towards Armenia, see Börm (2018). See also Strabo 6.4.2. His statement is based on *RG* § 31, where it is said that Iberians, Albanians, and Medes sought Roman friendship. On the influence of Augustus' official language on Strabo, see Engels (1999), 350–358.

²⁷ Gregoratti (2013).

²⁸ According to Strabo 12.3.28, Lesser Armenia has been under the control of local dynasts (δυνάσται) who were ruling rather independently from the Pontic Empire. Mithridates spent a lot of energy in fortifying this area and bestowing benefits to its inhabitants. Still, some rulers of Lesser Armenia were siding with the Romans (Cass. Dio 36.48.1; Strabo 12.3.29).

²⁹ For the case of Armenia, see the pointed assessment of Traina (1999–2000), 68–72, at 69: 'langage symbolique de l'hellénisme coexiste avec celui de l'iranisme.' On this issue, see further Canepa (2017), 215–221; Daryaei (2017), *passim*, both arguing for a continuation of Iranian elements in Pontus and Armenia from the Achaemenid period until Late Antiquity. See also Chaumont (2011) who emphasises the strong ties between Armenia and Iran. A clear statement on the cultural dialogue can be found in Strabo 11.14.16: ἅπαντα μὲν οὖν τὰ τῶν Περσῶν ἱερὰ καὶ Μῆδοι καὶ Ἀρμένιοι τετιμῆκασιν, τὰ δὲ τῆς Ἀναϊτιδος διαφερόντως Ἀρμένιοι, ἐν τε ἄλλοις ἰδρυσάμενοι τόποις καὶ δὴ καὶ ἐν τῇ Ἀκιλίσσῃ. 'Both the Medes and Armenians have adopted all the sacred rites of the Persians, but the Armenians pay particular reverence to Anaitis, and have built temples to her honour in several places, especially in Acilisene [Upper Armenia].' (Trans. Falconer). See also Cass. Dio 36.48.1; Strabo 11.8.4, 12.3.27.

Transcaucasia since the period of Achaemenid domination and had left a considerable imprint on the indigenous peoples.³⁰ The ethnic and cultural diversity of the nobles was further enhanced during the long period of domination by Hellenistic rulers over this region. This diversity suggests that ancient Near Eastern and Macedonian concepts of monarchies shaped the idea of legitimate rulership among local elites.

Moving the discussion back to Roman military movement in the 60s BCE, the main problem for the modern understanding of the Transcaucasian campaign is the focus of the literary sources on Pompey, as a result of which the contexts of his decision-making are only poorly understood. Despite various possible explanations, it is conceivable that Pompey had heard that this region remained unstable and that its inhabitants had been allies of Mithridates and Tigranes.³¹ Even though Pompey's decision-making remains unclear, the sources clearly indicate that the Transcaucasian campaign was divided into three phases.

In the beginning, Pompey had his first encounter with the Albanians at the turn of the year 66. The Albanians allowed the Romans to march through until the weather conditions shifted in their favor. Subsequently, they crossed the river Araxes with an army but suffered a heavy defeat at the hands of Pompey and his troops, forcing them to negotiate a treaty (Cass. Dio 36.54.4–5; Plut. *Pomp.* 34.1–4). Having achieved this victory, Pompey focused on the neighbouring Iberians and this movement can be considered as comprising the second phase of the campaign (Cass. Dio 37.1–2; Plut. *Pomp.* 34). At this point, Plutarch makes a striking statement about the Roman expedition:

For the Iberians had not been subject either to the Medes or the Persians, and they escaped the Macedonian dominion also, since Alexander departed from Hyrcania in haste. Notwithstanding, Pompey routed this people also in a great battle, in which nine thousand of them were slain and more than ten thousand taken prisoners; then he invaded Colchis, where, at

³⁰ See Mitchell (2007); Briant (2015); Michels (2017). For example, Iberians were wearing both Armenian and Median clothes (Strabo 11.3.3).

³¹ Cass. Dio 36.54.1; Livy, *Per.* 101; Plut. *Luc.* 31.5. It should also be considered that, as a Roman general, Pompey had a certain degree of power and flexibility to make and implement decisions. Since Transcaucasia was divided into two independent kingdoms, it should not immediately be presumed that this campaign was within the scope of the Lex Manilia. See Dąbrowa (1989), 67–68 and van Wijlick (2021), 27–29 with bibliography on this issue. It can be said that scholarship is divided into two camps. Whereas Dreher (1996), 188–194, 207 argued that Pompey had developed his own aims and initiatives, the expansion of Roman territory in the East has been the primary motivation of him (following Sherwin-White, *CAH* XI 255–258). A third option is that Pompey wanted access to the trade routes beyond the Caucasus frontier. See Sherwin-White, *ibid.*, 257; Gregoratti (2013). Whatever the case, nothing prevented him from moving on to the Caucasus region after establishing ties to Armenia.

the river Phasis, Servilius met him, at the head of the fleet with which he was guarding the Euxine.³²

Proving the superiority of the Roman arms in battle allowed Pompey to campaign beyond the frontiers of the Achaemenid and Macedonian empires. Remarkably enough, without the note that a Roman fleet was awaiting Pompey, the reader of Plutarch's account would assume that the general rather aimed at surpassing Alexander's deeds rather than continuing his pursuit of Mithridates.³³ However, at that time, Pompey did not have the opportunity to celebrate his success as word reached him that the Albanians had broken the treaty (Cass. Dio 37.3.3; Plut. *Pomp.* 35.1). As a consequence, he again turned eastwards.

The final phase of the campaign complicates our interpretation of Pompey's intentions. Modern commentators argue that Pompey had no reason to campaign against the Albanians because his way to Mithridates through Colchis was free and considerable Roman forces remained in Armenia.³⁴ The sources do not allow the modern historian to draw a conclusion concerning the strategic situation, as different emphases are placed on various details pertaining to it. Intending to highlight the qualities of Pompey as a leader, Cassius Dio (37.3.3–4.4) and Appian (*Mithr.* 15.103) recount the route that the Roman army took through the mountains in detail. With regard to the battle, Plutarch once again provides his readers with a colourful account, which is worthy of being quoted in full:

Turning back against these [sc. Albanians] in resentment and wrath, [Pompey] crossed the Cynus again with great difficulty and hazard, since the Barbarians had fenced off its banks with long stretches of palisades; then, since he must make a long march through a waterless and difficult country, he ordered ten thousand skins to be filled with water, and with this provision advanced upon the enemy. He found them drawn up on the river Abas, sixty thousand foot and twelve thousand horse, but wretchedly armed, and clad for the most part in the skins of wild beasts. They were led by a brother of the king, named Cosis, who, as soon as the fighting was at close quarters, rushed upon Pompey himself and smote him with a javelin on the fold of his breastplate; but Pompey ran him through the body and killed him. In this battle it is said that there were also Amazons fighting on the side of the Barbarians, and that they came down from the mountains about the river Thermodon. For when the Romans were de-

32 Plut. *Pomp.* 34.5: οὕτε γὰρ Μήδοις οὕτε Πέρσαις ὑπήκουσαν Ἰβήρες, διέφυγον δὲ καὶ τὴν Μακεδόνων ἀρχήν, Ἀλεξάνδρου διὰ ταχέων ἐκ τῆς Ὑρκανίας ἀπάραντος. οὐ μὴν ἀλλὰ καὶ τούτους μάχη μεγάλη τρεψάμενος ὁ Πομπήϊος, ὥστε ἀποθανεῖν μὲν ἐνακισχιλίους, ἀλῶναι δὲ πλείους μυρίων, εἰς τὴν Κολχικὴν ἐνέβαλε καὶ πρὸς τὸν Φᾶσιν αὐτῷ Σερουῖλιος ἀπὴντησε, τὰς ναῦς ἔχων αἷς ἐφρούρει τὸν Πόντον (Trans. Loeb).

33 Cass. Dio 37.3.1–3 is clear that Pompey intended to campaign towards the Crimean Bosphorus, as he omits to mention Alexander in this context.

34 Dreher (1996), 195–196.

spoiling the Barbarians after the battle, they came upon Amazonian shields and buskins; but no body of a woman was seen. The Amazons inhabit the parts of the Caucasus mountains that reach down to the Hyrcanian Sea, and they do not border on the Albani, but Gelae and Leges dwell between. With these peoples, who meet them by the river Thermodon, they consort for two months every year; then they go away and live by themselves. After the battle, Pompey set out to march to the Hyrcanian and Caspian Sea, but was turned back by a multitude of deadly reptiles when he was only three days march distant, and withdrew into Lesser Armenia.³⁵

Apart from some striking—and fanciful—details in the description of the battle by Plutarch, the geographical setting of the campaign invites discussion. Plutarch states that the Amazons joined the battle on the side of the Albanians. In terms of mental geography, his statement indicates that the Romans were fighting a battle against inhabitants of the land of myth, which was supposed to lie somewhere between the Caucasus and the Hyrcanian Sea.³⁶ Although Pompey failed to reach the shore of the Hyrcanian Sea, Plutarch penned this passage with the tacit understanding that Pompey was again contesting Alexander's achievements.³⁷ But his statement needs to be examined in light of the fact that Alexander never gained possession of Armenia. This fact is an aspect submerged in the historiography related to his conquest, as only Strabo explicitly states that Macedonian soldiers failed to conquer this region.³⁸ The details of Plutarch's account indicate that he relied on a

35 *Pomp.* 35–36.1: ἡ μὲν οὖν Μιθριδάτου δίωξις ἐνδεδυκότος εἰς τὰ περὶ Βόσπορον ἔθνη καὶ τὴν Μαιώτιν ἀπορίας εἶχε μεγάλας· Ἄλβανοί δὲ αὐθις ἀφεστῶτες αὐτῷ προσηγγέλησαν. πρὸς οὓς ὑπ' ὀργῆς καὶ φιλονεικίας ἐπιστρέψας τὸν τε Κύρνον μόλις καὶ παραβόλως πάλιν διεπέρασεν ἐπὶ πολὺ σταυροῖς ὑπὸ τῶν βαρβάρων ἀποκεχαρακμένον, καὶ μακρὰς αὐτὸν ἐκδεχομένης ἀνύδρου καὶ ἀργαλέας δοῦο, μυρρίους ἄσκούς ὕδατος ἐμπλησάμενος ἤλαυνεν ἐπὶ τοὺς πολεμίους, καὶ κατέλαβε πρὸς Ἄβαντι ποταμῷ παρατεταγμένους ἐξακισμυρίους πεζοὺς καὶ δισχιλίους ἵππεῖς ἐπὶ μυρρίοις, ὥπλισμένους δὲ φαύλως καὶ δέρμασι θηρίων τοὺς πολλοὺς, ἠγεῖτο δὲ αὐτῶν βασιλέως ἀδελφὸς ὄνομα Κῶσις. οὗτος ἐν χερσὶ τῆς μάχης γενομένης ἐπὶ τὸν Πομπήϊον ὁρμήσας αὐτὸν ἔβαλεν ἐπὶ τὴν τοῦ θώρακος ἐπιτυχήν ἀκοντίσματι, Πομπήϊος δὲ ἐκείνον ἐκ χειρὸς διελάσας ἀνείλεν. ἐν ταύτῃ τῇ μάχῃ λέγονται καὶ Ἀμαζόνες συναγωνίσασθαι τοῖς βαρβάροις, ἀπὸ τῶν περὶ τὸν Θερμῶδοντα ποταμὸν ὄρων καταβάσαι. μετὰ γὰρ τὴν μάχην σκυλεύοντες οἱ Ῥωμαῖοι τοὺς βαρβάρους πέλταις Ἀμαζονικαῖς καὶ κοθόρνοις ἐνετύγχανον, σῶμα δὲ οὐδὲν ὥφθη γυναικεῖον. νέμονται δὲ τοῦ Καυκάσου τὰ καθήκοντα πρὸς τὴν Ὑρκανίαν θάλασσαν, οὐχ ὁμοροῦσαι τοῖς Ἀλβανοῖς, ἀλλὰ Γέλαι καὶ Λήγες οἰκοῦσι διὰ μέσου· καὶ τούτοις ἔτους ἐκάστου δύο μῆνας εἰς ταῦτο φοιτῶσαι περὶ τὸν Θερμῶδοντα ποταμὸν ὀμιλοῦσιν, εἴτα καθ' αὐτὰς ἀπαλλαγεῖσαι βιοτεύουσιν. ὁρμήσας δὲ μετὰ τὴν μάχην ὁ Πομπήϊος ἐλαύνει ἐπὶ τὴν Ὑρκανίαν καὶ Κασπίαν θάλασσαν, ὑπὸ πλήθους ἐρπετῶν θανασίμων ἀπετράπη τριῶν ὁδῶν ἡμερῶν ἀποσχών, εἰς δὲ τὴν μικρὰν Ἀρμενίαν ἀνεχώρησε (Trans. Loeb).

36 On the location of the Amazons on the fringes of the *oikoumene* in Hellenistic and Roman literature, see Bichler and Rollinger (2017), 18–20.

37 Tarn (1901), 21; Bābler (2019), 17.

38 Strabo 11.14.9. See also Arr. *Anab.* 3.16; 5.5.2–3; Curt. 6.14.9; Diod. Sic. 17.21.7; 64.6. See Shayegan (2006), 112 and Degen (2022a), 343 on Mithrenes.

source which suggested that Pompey extended his conquests to regions untouched by Alexander. This raises the question of Plutarch's source(s).

II The reception of Theophanes' Pompey in Plutarch

Modern historians largely agree that the narrative provided by Theophanes of Mytilene most likely represents the common tradition found in the writings of Appian, Cassius Dio, Plutarch, and Strabo on Pompey's expedition to Transcaucasia.³⁹ While these authors share certain details, they place emphasis on different things in their accounts. Consequently, it is not as apparent how their writings correlate with the fragments attributed to Theophanes. This applies in particular to Plutarch, who provides the most detailed account of the battle fought between Pompey and the Albanians. It is important to emphasise that our understanding of Theophanes' lost account heavily depends on Strabo's *Geography*, and thus the details provided by him can help us to understand the relationship between Plutarch and Theophanes.⁴⁰ A comparison between the accounts of Plutarch and Strabo is warranted due to the numerous references made by Plutarch to Theophanes and his historiographical account in various instances throughout his own works.⁴¹ Despite the absence of any mention of the battle by Strabo, Plutarch's battle description contains certain elements that correspond to Strabo's geographical description of Armenia and the Caucasus. It is important to note that when describing these regions, Strabo specifically cites Theophanes as his source. Three parallels between the historiographical account of Plutarch and the geographical description of Strabo can be drawn.

Firstly, the Amazons are mentioned in the accounts of Plutarch, Appian, and Strabo. While Appian (*Mithr.* 15.103) briefly mentions that women were among the captives taken by the Romans after the battle, who had wounds no less severe than the men, Strabo explicitly refers to Theophanes when describing the Amazons. Since Strabo refers to Theophanes as his source, his description is qualified as a

³⁹ See Lacquer (1934); Dreher (1996), 198–199; Dowden (1997), 115–116; Santangelo (2015), esp. 112–113; Traina (2016), 113. There are many parallels concerning the campaign to Transcaucasia between the surviving fragments of Theophanes' lost work and Plut. *Pomp.* See Heftner (1995), 53–59.

⁴⁰ *BNJ* 188 T1 (= Strabo 13.2.3); T2 (= Strabo 11.5.1); F3 (= Strabo 11.2.2); F4 (= Strabo 11.5.1); F5 (= Strabo 11.14.4); F6 (= Strabo 11.14.11); F7 (= Strabo 12.3.28).

⁴¹ *BNJ* 188 T4a (= Plut. *Pomp.* 42.8); T5c (= Plut. *Pomp.* 49.13–14); T8c (= Plut. *Cic.* 38.4); T8d (= Plut. *Pomp.* 76.6–9); F1 (= Plut. *Pomp.* 37.1–4).

fragment of the latter's now lost account (*BNJ* 188 F4) and is thus worth quoting in full:

The Amazons, also, are said to live in the mountains above Albania. Now Theophanes, who made the expedition with Pompey and was in the country of the Albanians, says that the Gelae and the Legae, Scythian people, live between the Amazons and the Albanians, and that the Mermadalis River flows there, midway between these people and the Amazons.⁴²

Strabo gives us insight into what Theophanes originally wrote about the Amazons. He located the Amazons in the mountains above Albania, which is information that he most likely gave in the context of his account of Pompey's expedition to Transcaucasia. When speculating about the placement of this fragment within Theophanes' mostly lost account, it is important to consider that Strabo, unlike Plutarch, does not provide an account of the battle. Strabo may have used Theophanes' work to enhance his geographical description by incorporating additional details that could have possibly been extracted from a battle account.⁴³

Moreover, Theophanes is suggested as the common source of Strabo and Plutarch due to the mention of Gelae and Legae, which do not appear in any other source except in their writings.⁴⁴ Since Strabo mentions these peoples in a passage where he refers to Theophanes as his source, it is probable that this specific piece of information originated in the work of Theophanes. Thus, it is fair to say that Plutarch's battle description and Strabo's geographical digression were most likely drawn from Theophanes' historiographical account. The precise manner in which Theophanes described the battle, however, can only be speculated upon. The evidence supporting Theophanes' mention of a battle involving living Amazons is derived from Plutarch's statement that no female bodies were found on the battlefield. Only their shields (πέλταις Ἀμαζονικαῖς) were found. Interestingly, this statement could be connected to Pompey's visual representation in Rome. The depiction of πέλται as weaponry used by enemies became increasingly popular in Roman art due to Pompey's military achievements.⁴⁵ The importance of Amazons for Pompey's representation suggests that Theophanes mentioned their presence in the battle,

42 Strabo 11.5.5: ἐν δὲ τοῖς ὑπὲρ τῆς Ἀλβανίας ὄρεσι καὶ τὰς Ἀμαζόνας οἰκεῖν φασι. Θεοφάνης μὲν οὖν ὁ συστρατεύσας τῷ Πομπηίῳ καὶ γενόμενος ἐν τοῖς Ἀλβανοῖς, μεταξὺ τῶν Ἀμαζόνων καὶ τῶν Ἀλβανῶν φησι Γήλας οἰκεῖν καὶ Λήγας Σκύθας, καὶ ρεῖν ἐνταῦθα τὸν Μερμάδαλιν ποταμὸν τοῦτων τε καὶ τῶν Ἀμαζόνων ἀνὰ μέσον (Trans. Falconer).

43 See Dowden (1997), 115–116.

44 Roller (2018), 648: 'The Gelians and Legians are unknown except for Strabo's report and a similar one by Plutarch (*Pompeius* 35.4), probably both from Theophanes.'

45 Östenberg (2009), 148–149.

where they were believed to live, as a way to further promote and enhance his portrayal of Pompey as an outstanding general. It is worth noting that Lucullus, Pompey's predecessor in the Mithridatic War, claimed to have sacked the city of Themiskyra, which was considered the mythical residence of the Amazons.⁴⁶ Accordingly, Theophanes' Amazonian shields could have been used to help promote Pompey as worthy rival to Lucullus.

Secondly, in addition to Plutarch, Strabo (11.4.1–5) also offers a description of the Albani who fought against Pompey. While Strabo does not explicitly mention Theophanes' work as his source, the context and content of this passage strongly suggest that it served as such. Strabo describes the Albanians as skilled warriors armed with javelins and bows, and wearing helmets made from the skins of wild animals. However, although these same details can also be found in Plutarch's account of the Albanian troops, one particular detail in his account is not reported by any other author, including Strabo. This detail is the duel between Pompey and the Albanian general Kosis. The only achievement similar to this noted by Plutarch is that of Marcus Claudius Marcellus in 222 BCE, where he earned the *spolia opima* by defeating the Gaulish general Viridomarus in a duel. Plutarch's description of Kosis' demise does share some similarities with Marcellus' well-known story, such as the spearing through of the enemy's body (Livy, *Epit.* 20; Verg. *Aen.* 6.859; Prop. 4.10.39–41; Plut. *Marc.* 6–8). It is possible that this was a purposeful form of flattery on Theophanes' part. By suggesting that Pompey deserved the *spolia opima* for killing the Albanian king's brother, Theophanes found the closest historical event chronologically speaking to make his case.

Thirdly, Strabo mentions that the region beyond Albania, called Cambysene, is a rugged and waterless land.⁴⁷ It is possible that he derived this geographical information from Theophanes' account of Armenia and Albania, as it is Theophanes to whom he attributes such a description (*BNJ* 188 F6 = Strabo 11.14.11). Cassius Dio (37.3.5) and Plutarch (*Pomp.* 35.2) also mention the challenges faced by the Roman army when traversing this region.

Considering these parallels, it appears that Plutarch likely drew upon Theophanes' account when writing about the battle between Pompey and the Albani. His choice might have been intentional, as other sources on Pompey's expedition were

⁴⁶ App. *Mith.* 78. See Östenberg (2009), 149.

⁴⁷ Strabo 11.4.5: ἡ δ' ἐκ τῆς Ἰβηρίας εἰς τὴν Ἀλβανίαν εἰσβολὴ διὰ τῆς Καμβυσσηνῆς ἀνύδρου τε καὶ τραχείας ἐπὶ τὸν Ἀλαζόνιον ποταμόν. θηρευτικοὶ δὲ καὶ αὐτοὶ καὶ οἱ κύνες αὐτῶν εἰς ὑπερβολὴν, οὐ τέχνη μᾶλλον ἢ σπουδὴ τῇ περὶ τοῦτο. 'The entrance from Iberia into Albania is through the Cambysene, a country without water, and rocky, to the river Alazonius. The people themselves and their dogs are excessively fond of the chase, pursuing it with equal eagerness and skill' (Trans. Falconer).

available to him in his time.⁴⁸ Although a certain answer cannot be given as to why he did so, it seems at least probable that Plutarch chose Theophanes' account as universalism was important to his literary production. I have elsewhere discussed, for example, that universalism is also an essential theme in Plutarch's *Life of Alexander*.⁴⁹ Universalism was also a crucial concept for imperial representation in the days of Pompey and Plutarch.⁵⁰ Interestingly, there are only a few similarities between Strabo's account and those of Appian and Cassius Dio. Those could be attributed to the fact that these authors devoted less attention to the battle, as Plutarch's account represents the most comprehensive source on it. Now two aspects still require explanation: why Theophanes would possibly have had living Amazons fighting in the battle and why he was interested in describing this region close to the Hyrcanian Sea.

In light of all the information presented, it is important to emphasise that there are some striking parallels between Pompey, as originally portrayed by Theophanes, and Alexander, as he is represented in the fragments aligned with the works of the first Greek authors who joined him on his expedition.⁵¹ This especially applies to the similarities between the campaign to Transcaucasia and Alexander's movements to the Northern Ocean, the river Tanais, and the Hindu-Kush. These parallels merit a serious examination, not only since they have not been addressed in previous scholarship on Pompey's imitation of Alexander but also because they can assist in revealing why he employed Alexander as a device for his representation.

The number of fragments of Aristobulos and Onesicritus about Alexander testify to the fact that these authors were widely known among Roman intellectuals in the late Republic. Even though they only provide a few insights, it is still possible to understand Alexander's intended representation and get a sense of his imperial aspirations.⁵² In this context, Armenia presents an interesting case, since it remains the only region of the Achaemenid Empire that escaped Alexander's conquest, which required the self-appointed 'King of Asia' to acknowledge the fact that he failed to gain possession of the Caucasus region.⁵³ With the help of geographical fiction, Aristobulos and others crafted the idea that Alexander had indeed crossed

48 On the historiographical of Pompey's expedition to Transcaucasia, see Dreher (1996), *passim*; Santangelo (2015), esp. 112–113.

49 See Degen (2022a), 352–353 on Plut. *Alex.* 66.1.

50 Bosworth (1999); Spickermann (2021).

51 Engster (2011), 200–206; Welch and Mitchell (2013) provide overview on parallels between Pompey and Alexander, according to Diod. Sic., Just. *Epit.*, Curt. and Arr.

52 On geographical fictions and Alexander's aims, see Marín (2017); Squillace (2018); Degen (2022b).

53 On Alexander as 'King of Asia', see Nawotka (2012).

the Caucasus, which was considered to be a continuous mountain range from Asia Minor to India. Considering the Hindu-Kush to be part of the Caucasus, they supported Alexander's overstated claim of having conquered all the lands of the Great King.⁵⁴ Finally, as we learn from Herodotus, the Caucasus was known to the Greeks as the northern administrative border of the Achaemenid Empire (3.97.4). Aristobulos exaggerated the deeds of Alexander by changing the original name of the river from Iaxartes to Tanaïs.⁵⁵ According to Strabo (11.7.4), the river Tanaïs had a great symbolic meaning to the Greeks, Macedonians, and the great number of Asians among Alexander's entourage,⁵⁶ as it represented the northern edge of the Achaemenid Empire. Following Aristobulos and Ptolemy, the Tanaïs also marks the limits of the imperial ambitions of Cyrus and Darius, where they failed to defeat the nomads (the so-called Sacae) dwelling there.⁵⁷ Interestingly, Herodotus and Strabo mention that Darius reached this river during his campaign against the European Scythians. They describe the land as a waterless desert, which is similar to how the authors who wrote about Alexander describe the land beyond the Iaxartes.⁵⁸ Thus, it is hardly surprising that Theophanes also gave this river the name Tanaïs. He also described the natural environment of the land into which Pompey penetrated as having striking similarities to what was described by the first Greek authors concerning the land beyond the Tanaïs during the time of Alexander's conquests, in that both regions were said to be deserts (*BNJ* 188 F3 = Strabo 11.2.2; Arr. *Anab.* 4.3.4; Curt. 7.8.23).

Moreover, judging from what has remained of the first accounts of Alexander, it can fairly be said that carrying conquest to the edges of the known world was considered the most distinguishing feature of the Macedonian conqueror to Roman authors. These edges were represented by the shores of the Ocean. Understandably, it was important for Alexander to claim to have reached the Hyrcanian Sea, which was considered a bay of the Northern Ocean.⁵⁹ There, at the northernmost fringes of the world, Alexander, and later Pompey, are said to have defeated the local inhabitants (Aristobulos or Onesicritus: Arr. *Anab.* 3.24.1–3; Curt. 6.5.11). Furthermore, geographical fiction again proved to be a helpful tool for the first Greek authors to

⁵⁴ Although Arr. *Anab.* 5.3.1–4 and Strabo 11.5.5 do not refer to Aristobulos as their source, the passage corresponds with the narrative of the other fragments aligned to him. See Marin (2017), 300; Degen (2022a), 340–344.

⁵⁵ Aristobulos: *BNJ* 139 F25 (= Arr. *Anab.* 3.30.7); Polycleitus of Larissa: *BNJ* 128 F7 (= Strabo 11.7.4).

⁵⁶ On Asians in Alexander's entourage and army, see Degen (2022a), 402–408.

⁵⁷ Arr. *Anab.* 4.4–5; Curt. 7.8–9. See Bosworth (1995), 29; 32.

⁵⁸ Hdt. 4.123; Strabo 7.3.13; 16.1.3. See also Arr. *Anab.* 1.4.4; Strabo 11.4.6 (Danube); Curt. 5.25.5 (Tanaïs).

⁵⁹ See Degen (2022b), 27–32, 44–54 on Arr. *Anab.* 5.25.4–5. Until Late Antiquity, ancient geographers reached no census on this issue: see McPhail and Robert (2008–2011).

create the idea of Alexander having pushed to the limits of the world. A fragment of Onesicritus' account that has survived in Plutarch's *Life of Alexander* provides evidence that this writer introduced to the tradition an alleged encounter between the Macedonian conqueror and the Amazons somewhere in northern Hyrcania.⁶⁰ Strabo provides evidence that this parallel incident was not a product of Plutarch but rather a statement he found in Theophanes' account.⁶¹ Apart from Pompey's claim of surpassing the achievements of Lucullus, it seems that he also aimed to assert his own superiority over Alexander's deeds. Since Alexander is said to have engaged in intimate relations with the queen of the Amazons, the statement that Pompey defeated these mythical female warriors in battle and displayed their weaponry is seemingly intended to exaggerate his deeds with respect to those of Alexander.

Concerning the Albanians, the ideological value of defeating them for Pompey may be explained by the fact that they fought on the side of the Great King against Alexander in the Battle of Gaugamela. Aristobulos included them in his list of nations fighting alongside Darius III (*BNJ* 139 F17 = Arr. *Anab.* 3.11.3–7). Seen in light of all the similarities examined here, it is not surprising that the diplomatic encounters between Pompey and the Parthians in the aftermath of the campaign come across as reminiscent of those between Alexander and Darius III.⁶² The culmination of the parallels between the first Greek accounts concerning Alexander and the fragments aligned with Theophanes in the battle against the Albanians qualifies this episode as a key event in this latter author's account.

While it cannot be conclusively proven that Plutarch's description of the battle is entirely attributed to Theophanes, it is evident that the details in his account align with Theophanes' intentions in how and why he represented Pompey's deeds as he did. Given those parallels, it is safe to say that Theophanes originally portrayed Pompey as a conqueror with a strong Alexandrian image which seems to have been the image that the Roman general promoted of himself. Since the evidence examined above rather suggests that Theophanes' Pompey outperformed the deeds of Alexander more than by simply imitating him, however, this invites further discussion.

⁶⁰ *BNJ* 134 F1 (= Plut. *Alex.* 46.1–3). See Baynham (2001), 115–124.

⁶¹ *BNJ* 188 F4 (= Strabo 11.5.1); App. *Mithr.* 103. See Santangelo (2015), 112–113.

⁶² Cass. Dio 37.6.2; Plut. *Pomp.* 38.2. On the diplomatic encountering of Alexander with Darius, see Degen (2022a), 159–174; Shayegan (2022).

III Universalism in Rome and the Hellenistic East

If Theophanes' account corresponds with the image that Pompey promoted of himself, his representation might have originally aimed at two distinct audiences: the elites of Rome and those of the Hellenistic East. Beginning with the Roman elites, the geographical argument in Theophanes' account is crucial for evaluating the Roman perspective of Pompey's campaign. In Augustan literature, the river Tanais was viewed as a significant boundary.⁶³ This is why it is emphasised in Augustus' claim to power in the *Res Gestae*. Although the Tanais is presented as the most far-flung boundary of the Roman Empire in the East, Augustus' proclamation does not fail to highlight that the empire wielded influence even beyond its administrative frontiers. In the same paragraph of the *Res Gestae* that mentions the Tanais, it is said that Transcaucasia is a borderland with inhabitants seeking Roman friendship.⁶⁴ From a Roman perspective, this means that Pompey's campaign extended conquest to the empire's utmost limits. At this point, it is important to emphasise that the *Res Gestae* were most likely influenced by Pompey's self-representation, Pompey having effectively established himself as a world conqueror in the eyes of the Roman audience.⁶⁵

Besides the Armenians, the Iberians and Albanians make a notable appearance in Pompey's third triumph in Rome. The theme of the triumph was that of world conquest, as can be seen from Cicero, Diodorus, and Plutarch (Cic. *Sest.* 129; Diod. Sic. 40.4; Plut. *Pomp.* 45.4–5). With just a slight stretch of imagination, this can be seen as an argument by Pompey that he surpassed the renowned achievements of Alexander. Since the Romans considered Alexander to be the embodiment of the rule of Asia, Pompey used this narrative to complete his public image as a world conqueror, which he had begun to create in the preceding years. At earlier points in his career, he already claimed to have carried conquest to the fringes of the world as he did in the case of his campaigns to Africa, Spain, and finally in Transcaucasia. Note that all of these lands were associated with the Ocean, which was regarded as the body of water encircling the world (Plut. *Pomp.* 38.2–3). This also perfectly corresponds with Pompey's dedicatory inscription to Minerva, as mentioned by Pliny, which referred to the territorial gains from his campaign in Asia. In this inscription, it is stated that the general had 'conquered the lands between the Maeotian Lake and the Red Sea' (Plin. *HN* 7.98: *terris a Maeotis ad Rubrum mare subactis*). The

⁶³ Ballesteros Pastor (2011); Dan (2016); Babnis (2019), 9–18.

⁶⁴ RG 31. The same idea can be found in Strabo's 6.4.2 description of Transcaucasia.

⁶⁵ Bosworth (1999), 2 (elements related to Alexander); Lehmann (2004) (Pompey's representation was the model for the *Res Gestae*). See also Plin. *HN* 7.98 mentioning the Albanians and Iberia in the introduction to Pompey's third triumph in Rome.

statement created the impression of Roman rule extending from one side of the Ocean to the other, highlighting his achievement of universalism.⁶⁶ Diodorus makes Pompey's claim in this inscription even more explicit by stating that 'he extended the borders of the empire up to the borders of the world' (Diod. Sic. 40.4.1: καὶ τὰ ὅρια τῆς ἡγεμονίας τοῖς ὅροις τῆς γῆς προσβιβάσας). Even though by stating that conquest had been carried to the world's edges, this perception was less a reflection of the actual than of the theoretical claim to rule the world.⁶⁷ Additionally, the Romans were aware that prior to Pompey's war against Mithridates, Lucullus had not succeeded in subduing the Iberians and Albanians.⁶⁸ Thus, Pompey found a suitable example in the Caucasus to illustrate his unparalleled military triumph in the East in a way that was easily understood by all Romans. On the one hand, the masses who witnessed the triumph could see Pompey as a world conqueror extending his victories to the most distant corners of the world.⁶⁹ On the other hand, Pompey's military accomplishments could also serve as a forceful counterargument to senatorial opposition.

Furthermore, at the close of the Republican period, powerful generals like Pompey not only changed the political atmosphere in Rome but also the idea of empire. Although the idea of empire was still associated with the *res publica* as a collective, the room for staging individual success was no longer limited as it had been traditionally.⁷⁰ Hence, it appears that Pompey left a considerable imprint on Roman nobles. This has often been assumed to be due to the fact that shortly after the conquest of the Near East, Caesar highlighted his military success by claiming to have reached the fringes of the world in Europe.⁷¹ Apparently, the context of Pompey's and Caesar's self-representations and, later on Augustus', was doubtlessly that of universalism. Nevertheless, it is important to note that at the time of the late Republic, universalism was already well known and the main ideological argument in the strategies of legitimation that Alexander and his successors used and had already been developed earlier in the Near East.⁷² In this context, it is important to emphasise that the claim of expanding conquest to Transcaucasia, or, more broadly, to the

66 Clarke (2017), 49–50. The geographical concept underlying this idea was rich in tradition and must have been popular among the Roman elites. See, e.g., Arist. [*Mund.*] 393a–b.

67 See Bosworth (1999) on the Roman idea of universalism. On the ancient Near Eastern and Hellenistic ideas of universalism, see Strootman (2014a, 2014b); Rollinger (2021); Degen (2022c).

68 Sherwin-White, *CAH IX* 257.

69 Dueck (2020), 131–138.

70 See Richardson (1991).

71 See Bosworth (1999), 14; Krebs (2006), 119–124; Welch and Mitchell (2013), 89; Bichler and Rollinger (2017), 23–24.

72 Bosworth (1999) (Hellenistic to early Imperial period); Strootman (2014) (Hellenistic); Rollinger (2021) (Achaemenid period); Degen (2022c) (Alexander).

northern reaches of the world, had already been a significant aspect of the universalism proclaimed by the ancient Near Eastern empires. In addition, the elites of the Hellenistic East regarded the claim of having conquered this region as a vital criterion for legitimate rulership, as evident from the enduring presence of this idea throughout the entire first millennium BCE.

The two most significant characteristics of imperial ideology in all ancient Near Eastern empires were, firstly, the assertion of possession of the extreme edges of the world and, secondly, the competitive ideal of surpassing the accomplishments of former kings.⁷³ These two ideas formed the core of the discourse on empire, which emerged as early as the start of the first millennium BCE among the rulers of the Neo-Assyrian Empire, the first paradigmatic imperial formation in the ancient Near East. The succeeding empires of the Babylonians, Persians, and finally Hellenistic rulers perpetuated the Assyrian claim to universalism, but they also transformed it.⁷⁴

To satisfactorily prove that universalism was achieved, the Neo-Assyrian kings used a particular mental map in their royal inscriptions, assuming the edges of the world to be the shores of the so-called 'Upper and the Lower Sea' which correspond to the present-day Mediterranean Sea and the Persian Gulf.⁷⁵ Due to competitive ideals inherent in Assyrian royal ideology, the claim was consistently extended to encompass territories in the middle of the sea. These ideals compelled future rulers to devise new tropes to assert their imperial achievements.⁷⁶ As a result, a discursive framework for assessing successful rulership was introduced that continued to be important in the Neo-Babylonian and Persian periods until the rise of Achaemenid Persia as an empire under Cyrus II.⁷⁷ His son and successor, Cambyses II, proceeded with both the ancient Near Eastern tropes and the narrative of imperial extension in his representation.⁷⁸ In a similar vein, albeit under different circumstances, Darius I devised his own notions of universalism that were unparalleled in the history of ancient Near Eastern empires. He promoted the belief that the Ocean encircling the world served as the outermost boundaries of his dominions. Significantly, his claim even extended to the lands that potentially existed beyond the

⁷³ On the claim to control the ends of the world, see Biran, Pines and Rüpke (2021), 5–8; 15–38; Gehler and Rollinger (2022), 6–14. On outperforming the achievements of former kings, see Haubold (2012); Degen (2022a), 332–402.

⁷⁴ Bichler and Rollinger (2017); Degen (2024).

⁷⁵ Yamada (2005); Lang and Rollinger (2010), 216–221.

⁷⁶ Parker (2011), 359–364; Haubold (2012), 5–7; Degen (2022c), 532–541.

⁷⁷ Cyrus Cylinder ll. 28'–30' in the edition of Schaudig (2018), 23–24. On the theme of universalism in the representation of Cyrus, see Waters (2018).

⁷⁸ On Hdt. 3.34.4, see Haubold (2012), 7; Degen (2022c), 529.

Ocean. For this purpose, the Achaemenids adopted the mental geographical framework of Babylonian scholars, who conceived of the Ocean as a canal-like body of water encircling the world. This Ocean served as the boundary that separated the inhabited world from a vaguely known space in which mythical creatures were believed to live.⁷⁹ In this way, the Ocean became the reference point for claiming universalism that continued to be important, not only for Alexander and his successors but also for Roman generals and emperors.⁸⁰

While the Roman emperors considered the Hellenistic representation suitable for their purposes, Alexander and his successors had different intentions. An argument can be made that Alexander and the Diadochi employed existing models of rulership to gain support from Asian aristocrats. This, in turn, led to the transformation of Mediterranean and ancient Near Eastern monarchical concepts, resulting in a range of reactions from the elites, both acceptance and resistance.⁸¹ In light of this discourse on empire, it is possible to offer an alternative explanation for Alexander's ambition to reach the northern, eastern, and southern shores of the Ocean, rather than attributing it to irrational decision-making as some previous scholars have argued.⁸² This is particularly true because reaching the shores of the Northern Ocean held significant importance as an argument for asserting universalism and royal accomplishment during the Achaemenid and Hellenistic periods.⁸³ This brings us to Pompey, who asserted his conquests extended to the Northern Ocean.

It is therefore plausible to suggest that an educated Roman of Pompey's era could have readily recognised the parallels between the general's claim of universalism and an episode described in the *Histories* of Herodotus. In that account, the Great King Cyrus is reported to have campaigned in the lands beyond the River Araxes, near the Northern Ocean, where he met the Scythian Massagetae.⁸⁴ The expedition resulted in the death of Cyrus and a total defeat of the Persian troops. This story in Herodotus is important for understanding Pompey's campaign, as it corresponds with ancient Near Eastern sources. Although the overweening ambition of Cyrus and the fatalism of imperialism are the predominant elements in his narrative, it seems that Herodotus' account also serves as a creative response to Achae-

⁷⁹ Delnero (2017); Degen (2022c), 534–535.

⁸⁰ Only an incomplete overview on the Ocean as focal point of Roman universalism can be provided here. E.g., Ael. *Or.* 26.16; 28; Caes. *B Gall.* 1.1.5–7; Cic. *Phil.* 4.14–15; *Mur.* 22; *Verr.* 2.3.207; *Prov. cons.* 29–31; Plin. *HN* 7.97–98; Livy 28.32; 39; 105.5; Sen. *Ep.* 119.7–8; Strabo 17.3.24; Suet. *Aug.* 25; *Claud.* 44; 47; *Galb.* 12.1; 31.2; RG 13.26; Tac., *Hist.* 1.9.3; 2.38.1; 62.

⁸¹ Haubold (2013), 127–184; Degen (2022a), 40–51.

⁸² Degen (2024); (2022a), 332–340.

⁸³ Rollinger and Degen (2021).

⁸⁴ Hdt. 1.201–14; Strabo 11.8.6. In Graeco-Roman sources (esp. Strabo 11.6.6), the Massagetae were considered Scythians and Sacae.

menid historiography. The only ancient Near Eastern record of Cyrus' defeat is found in the famous Bisitun Inscription, where Darius I proudly proclaims his subjugation of the 'point-headed Sacae'.⁸⁵ To emphasise his remarkable accomplishment, Darius mentions that he crossed a body of water resembling an ocean. It can be supposed that the immense body of water Darius refers to is the river Araxes, as mentioned in Herodotus' account. Herodotus creates the perception of a mighty river that resembles an ocean, with islands as large as Lesbos scattered within it (1.202.1). Therefore, Darius' statement highlights that he outperformed the deeds of Cyrus by defeating the Scythians who live beyond the northern edges of the world. Furthermore, the claim of ruling the Sacae can be found in all the Achaemenid royal inscriptions until the time of Alexander.⁸⁶ The region surrounding the Hyrcanian Sea remained a focal point within the empire during the late Achaemenid period. The Great Kings Darius II, Artaxerxes II, and Artaxerxes III conducted military campaigns against the Cadusii, a people dwelling along the shores of the Hyrcanian Sea.⁸⁷ These campaigns presented the Achaemenids with an opportunity to assert universalism, as they reached the waters that they perceived as representing the Ocean in their mental map.

The idea of universalism expressed through the claim of having crossed the northern boundaries of the former Achaemenid Empire did not die with the Achaemenids. Alexander asserted that he had reached the Northern Ocean, which he identified as the Hyrcanian Sea, and claimed victory over its inhabitants.⁸⁸ Additionally, as previously mentioned, his successful crossing of the river Tanais and subjugation of the unconquered Scythians furthered projected his superiority over the Achaemenids in the eyes of his Asian subjects.⁸⁹ By using ancient Near Eastern concepts of imperial success, Alexander created a royal persona that served as a role model to his successors. Thus, it is not surprising that in the years following his death, his heirs focused on the northern fringes of the world to express their imperial ambitions. It was Seleucus I's general Demodamas who claimed to have surpassed the deeds of Alexander when crossing the Tanais (Plin. *HN* 6.49). Similarly, Seleucus sent out admiral Patrocles to explore the nature of the Caspian Sea and

⁸⁵ DB v 20–30 = § 74 (OP) in the edition of Schmitt (2009).

⁸⁶ See Rollinger and Degen (2021), 193–209 with references.

⁸⁷ Xen. *Hell.* 2.1.13 (Darius II against the Cadusii); Sachs and Hunger (1988), no. 3 69, rev. 8'–10' (Artaxerxes II's campaign against people dwelling close to the Hyrcanian Sea); Diod. Sic. 17.6.1; Just. *Epit.* 10.3.4–6 (Artaxerxes III's campaign against the Cadusii).

⁸⁸ Arr. *An.* 5.26.1–2; 7.10.5–7. See Degen (2022a), 346–351.

⁸⁹ See Curt. 7.9.17, where it is mentioned that when word had reached the Asians of Alexander's crossing of the Tanais and his defeat of the Scythians, they changed their rebellious attitude towards Macedonian rule.

find a passage from the Northern to the Eastern Ocean (*BNJ* 712 T3a-b; F7; also Strabo 11.11.6). In the years to come, later Hellenistic rulers maintained the claims of their ancestors, and therefore, universalism continued to be the defining feature of their self-representation.⁹⁰ The persistence of ancient Near Eastern geographical concepts after Alexander's reign suggests that Hellenism was not the end of imperial traditions but a phase of transformative ideation. Now the role played by Pompey in this context needs to be elucidated.

Whereas the intention and purpose behind Pompey's imitation of Alexander are unknown, the information provided by Plutarch can contribute much to our understanding of his representation in the Hellenistic East. As previously discussed, it is highly probable that Plutarch relied on Theophanes' account, which not only depicted Pompey in a manner similar to Alexander but also presented him as superior to the Macedonian conqueror. If this aspect is considered evidence of his representation instead of mere rhetorical ornamentation, it has the potential to stimulate further discussion about a dialogue between Pompey and the Near Eastern elites.⁹¹ Seen in the context of the aforementioned imperial traditions, Theophanes' portrayal of Pompey in his account aligns seamlessly with the expectations of Eastern nobles, who were well-acquainted with Hellenistic concepts of legitimacy. It should be emphasised that Pompey likely acquired knowledge of this tradition through his interactions with various nobles, particularly in regions such as Asia Minor, Pontus, and Armenia.⁹²

Remarkably, during Pompey's expedition to the Caucasus, local rulers established their strategies of legitimacy with a clear inspiration from Alexander and the Achaemenids. It is evident that the adoption of Achaemenid titles such as 'Great King' or 'Kings of Kings', as well as the association of their lineage with prominent figures like Cyrus, Darius, Alexander, and Seleucus.⁹³ The phenomenon of adopting

⁹⁰ Strootman (2014a, 2014b); Bichler and Rollinger (2017).

⁹¹ Welch and Mitchell (2013), 88: 'Pompeius, or more rightly his literary agents, led by Theophanes, could pick and choose from the Alexander material, and their choice fell on the role of the great conqueror.'

⁹² App. *Mithr.* 15.104–105; Cass. Dio 36.53.3–5; Plut. *Pomp.* 33.9. It can be assumed from Strabo 12.3.28–29 about Pompey's measures in Pontic sanctuaries that he was in contact with powerful locals. In addition, Cyrus' defeat at the Araxes in Herodotus echoed in the literature of the Republican and Imperial periods, and, moreover, the memory of the Achaemenid Empire in Roman times was still strong. Thus, Pompey and his entourage were probably familiar with Cyrus and Achaemenid history. See Bichler (2021), 63–68; 70–74 (reception of Cyrus' end in Roman literature); Makhlayuk (2015) (the Achaemenid Empire in Roman literature).

⁹³ On the phenomenon of the so-called 'Achaemenid Revival', see Shayegan (2011), 39–306 with a concise conclusion at p. 330–331. On Alexander as a reference-point in the representation of Near Eastern rulers, see Nabel (2018), *passim*.

these titles among Near Eastern rulers has been interpreted as universalism, serving the purpose of engaging the diverse elites within their realms.⁹⁴ However, empires and local rulers responded in various ways to Near Eastern imperial traditions. The following three examples exemplify how the Achaemenids and Alexander were used as a common ground to address the aristocrats. They also serve as testimonies to the vibrancy of the Near Eastern imperial tradition in the time of Pompey's conquest.

Firstly, Mithridates VI was able to resist Roman imperialism for over thirty years, in part because his rule was widely accepted among the diverse group of elites in his empire. He was the first Iranian ruler who made the emulation of the Achaemenids and Alexander the dominating feature of his political program. According to Justin's epitomes of Trogus' *Philippic History*, Mithridates' strategy of legitimation was to highlight that his ancestors were Cyrus and Darius on his father's side and Alexander and Seleucus on his mother's side.⁹⁵ Inventing ancestry, however, was nothing new in the world of the Hellenistic East. Mithridates VI was the scion of the line of Mithridates I, who was the first Iranian ruler to use elements of the Bisitun narrative of Darius to legitimise his rulership.⁹⁶ Therefore, genealogical fiction was less spontaneous but rather an inherent element in the dynastic representation of Mithridates' house. His successors ultimately continued to claim their ancestry from the Achaemenids, at least until the reign of the emperor Claudius (Tac. *Ann.* 12.18.4).

Secondly, the official language of Mithridates was not developed independently but rather fulfilled the expectations of the heterogeneous nobles in the Hellenistic East. Good examples of the prevailing models of monarchical rulership come from the Ariarathids of Cappadocia, the Orontids of Armenia, and finally Antiochos of Commagene. The strategies of legitimisation used by these dynasts blended together Near Eastern and Macedonian elements of monarchical rulership by claiming lineage from both the Achaemenids and Alexander.⁹⁷ These rulers, however, went even further than simply claiming the heritage of the two dynasties. They ultimately found themselves in competition by using Iranian elements to surpass the visual vocabulary of their rivals, which naturally presupposes a positively connoted mem-

⁹⁴ Strootman (2020), 156.

⁹⁵ Just. *Epit.* 38.7. See Bosworth and Wheatley (1998); Olbrycht (2009); Shayegan (2017), 426; Gatzke (2019), 164.

⁹⁶ App. *Mithr.* 9; Diod. Sic. 19.40.2; Polyb. 5.43.1–4. See Shayegan (2017), 432.

⁹⁷ Cappadocia: Diod. Sic. 31.19.1–2; Armenia: Strabo 11.14.15. See Traina (2023) highlighting the importance of Near Eastern elements in the representation of Tigranes II. In the case of Commagene, see the inscriptions on the fronts of Nemrud Dağı, where Alexander and the Achaemenids were referred to as predecessors of Antiochos. See Shayegan (2017), 431 with references.

ory of the Achaemenid past.⁹⁸ Such a connotation is suggested by Tacitus, who states that the cities of Asia Minor pointed out the privileges granted to them during the Achaemenid period, in order to negotiate their status with emperor Tiberius.⁹⁹

The final example comes from the Parthian Empire. During the period of the growing threat of the Romans along their western border, the representation of the Arsacid dynasty saw a revival of Achaemenid concepts and models. Scholars have assumed that the Parthian kings intended to win over the elites in the contested borderland in the west by making references to the Achaemenids.¹⁰⁰ Beginning with the reign of Mithridates II, certain elements of the Achaemenid royal representation were introduced into the representation and genealogy of the Arsacids.¹⁰¹ Remarkably, in the context of Armenia being a disputed borderland with Rome, the Parthians' claim to power incorporated references to Alexander alongside Achaemenid influence. Tacitus provides evidence for their claim when he mentions that the Parthian ruler Artabanus II justified his claim over Armenia by associating himself with Alexander and Cyrus.¹⁰² This claim of the Parthian kings provides the backdrop against which a plausible contextualisation of the diplomatic encounter between Pompey and Phraates III after the Transcaucasian campaign (Cass. Dio 37.5.2–3). Pompey felt confident enough to respond to Phraates without addressing him by his obligatory title of 'King of Kings' (Cass. Dio 37.6.2; Plut. *Pomp.* 38.2). This episode bears some resemblance to the 'Marathus Letters', which describe Alexander's diplomatic encounters with Darius III after the battle of Issus in 333 BCE. In these Darius III provoked Alexander by omitting to address him as 'king', while Alexander introduced himself as 'King of Asia' in his written response. Similarly, Pompey angered Phraates III by only addressing him as 'king' and not by his obligatory title of 'King of Kings' (Arr. *Anab.* 2.14.9; Curt. 4.1.8). Despite the potential influence of Graeco-Roman authors on their source material, contesting the legitimacy of the opponent may be the essence of these episodes.¹⁰³

Based on this, it appears probable that Pompey projected an image of himself as the representative of Roman rule in the East, using it as a tool for ideological conquest. Interestingly, despite the turbulent years of the civil wars, Roman dominance over Armenia faced challenges but ultimately remained intact until the region be-

⁹⁸ Canepa (2017), 215–221.

⁹⁹ Tac. *Ann.* 3.60–63. See Sergueenkova and Rojas (2017), 271–272.

¹⁰⁰ Shayegan (2011), 14–15, 244–245; Ballesteros Pastor (2015); Müller (2020), 142–143; Michels (2021), 486.

¹⁰¹ Shayegan (2011), 330–331.

¹⁰² Tac. *Ann.* 6.31. See Shayegan (2017), 435; Dąbrowa (2021), 51. For a more critical assessment of this passage see Nabel (2020), 184, arguing that this passage is a personal remark of Tacitus.

¹⁰³ Degen (2022a), 165–174; Shayegan (2022), 286, 300–308.

came a province.¹⁰⁴ Speculatively, it can be suggested that the local elites offered their support to Roman rule. It further seems that Pompey utilised Alexander as a means to demonstrate universalism to the nobles of the Hellenistic East. By surpassing Alexander's achievements, Pompey put himself in a dominant place in the prevailing discourse on empire, which was influenced by the involvement of the Parthians. Nevertheless, while the available sources do not extensively explore the reactions of local elites, there is epigraphical evidence that suggests Pompey was acknowledged as an authority by the eastern aristocrats. Inscriptions discovered in western Asia Minor, for instance, honour Pompey as the 'Lord of the Land and the Sea' (ἐπόπτης γῆς καὶ θαλάσσης).¹⁰⁵ By employing this particular phraseology, the residents of these cities did not bestow a novel title upon Pompey. Instead, they adopted a formula that carried a historical significance. It is worth noting that it was Alexander himself who sought to be recognised as the 'Lord over Land and Sea' (Arr. *Anab.* 7.15.5: γῆς τε ἀπάσης καὶ θαλάσσης κύριον). This suggests that the cities, in their reverence for Pompey, adhered to a Hellenistic paradigm in which the concept of universalism held significant importance. Modifications were required, however, as the cities acknowledged the distinction between honouring a Republican general rather than a monarch. Consequently, the inscriptions referred to Pompey using the neutral term ἐπόπτης.¹⁰⁶ Thus, the title signifies that during the Mithridatic Wars, the idea of universalism played a significant role in communicating legitimate rulership within the Hellenistic East.

In conclusion, it can be argued that Pompey constructed a persona influenced by prevailing imperial models, which had served as the framework for legitimate rulership in the Hellenistic East. This is evident from his assertion of surpassing Alexander's achievements in the Transcaucasian campaign. While the campaign may have also had strategic motives, the primary purpose was to shape Pompey's desired image, an image that Theophanes supported through his writings, to meet political requirements. Ultimately, this image fulfilled the expectations of the eastern elites without challenging the Roman concept of military leadership. Embracing the legacy of Alexander and associating himself with the concept of Near Eastern rulership proved to be an effective strategy for Pompey to gain support in the borderland with the Parthian Empire. By fulfilling the elites' expectations, the Roman

¹⁰⁴ Dąbrowa (2021), 47–51.

¹⁰⁵ *I. Kyzikos* II 24; *AE* 2000, 1387; *SEG* 49, 1509; 51, 158. See Schuler (2007), 389–393. The sea as crucial element in the title can be explained by the inhabitants of the cities of Asia Minor celebrating Pompey for having defeated the pirates (Cic. *Flac.* 14).

¹⁰⁶ On the meaning of ἐπόπτης, see Schuler (2007), 387–388 ('Aufseher, der aufgrund seiner hohen Stellung alles überblickt und kontrolliert'); Diggle, et al. (2021), 590 ('overseer').

general inadvertently tapped into an ancient tradition of claiming imperial success deeply rooted in the history of the Near East. The transmission of these Near Eastern ideas, spanning from the Achaemenid period to the emergence of succeeding empires, was facilitated by the diverse nobles of the Hellenistic East. Their expectations created an environment where invoking the spirit of Alexander became more than a mere literary device or personal motivation. It became a political myth resulting from ideation.

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