Working Hard for the Sovereignty:
An Examination of the Role Played by Armenia in the Balance of Power System Between Rome and Persia

Scott McDonald

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Faculty Mentors: Professor Elizabeth Digeser and Professor Adrienne Edgar

Table of Contents

Dedicated to Nina Garsoian and Robert W. Thomson, as without the work of these two trailblazing historians this thesis would have never been possible.

I. It's Not the Size that Counts

The general, although he was overcome by the despair of his army, first wrote a letter to Vologeses, not a suppliant petition, but in a tone of remonstrance against the doing of hostile acts on behalf of the Armenians, who always had been under Roman dominion, or subject to a king chosen by the emperor.[1]

"He did not," it was said, "repeat his former and frequent claims to the holding of Armenia, since the gods who ruled the destinies of the most powerful nations, had handed over its possession to the Parthians, not without disgrace to Rome.[2]

...refuge in Armenia, then a free country, and exposed to the power of Parthia and Rome, without being trusted by either...[3]

Three separate quotes, all painting a different picture of Armenia and its relationship between Rome and Persia, and all from the same author. While Tacitus's *Annals* covered a period earlier than the one focused on in this essay, these passages are nevertheless a fitting place to begin an essay dealing with Armenia's role in the Roman-Persian balance of power system because of the way they highlight Armenia's ever changing status. Was it a Roman client state? A Persian satrapy? Or an independent kingdom with its own agenda? As we will see throughout the course of this essay, the evidence conssitenly points to the latter.

While a few scholars have analyzed the influence that Armenia's larger neighbors, Rome and Persia, had on its domestic politics, economics, and culture, little has been said of how Armenia may have affected the tense relationship between these two ancient superpowers. This neglect can be attributed to a number of factors, including Armenia's relatively small size and the fact that the topic of ancient borderlands has only

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[1] Tacitus, *The Annals,* Book XV.
[2] Ibid.

recently begun to emerge more forcefully in scholarly discussion. In this paper, I will focus on the effect that Armenia had on the political and diplomatic relations of Rome and Persia, and because the period of Roman-Persian interaction was vast, some five hundred years, the paper deals with the 3rd and 4th centuries C.E. as this was a timeframe not only of extensive interaction among the three polities, but a period in which each underwent its own significant domestic political transformation as well.

This topic, though specific, brings up a surprisingly large number of interconnected questions. First off, was Armenia an active participant in the relationship between Rome and Persia, or was it merely acted upon by the larger powers? If it was an active participant as we will see, how was such a small region able to influence polities much larger than itself? Did this influence play a role in the political transitions that each polity underwent at some point during the 3rd and 4th centuries, and if so, how? Then there are the background issues that must be addressed in order to tackle these main questions. How did the people of Armenia identify themselves? As Roman, Persian, by local standards, or a mix of all three? What was the domestic political structure of the region, and how did the imperial ambitions of the region's neighbors fit into that structure? Did the Armenians have some degree of unity? What were the underlying motivations for Rome and Persia to control Armenia? Each of these queries is connected to the ultimate goal of determining how Armenia was able to influence diplomacy and international relations and how this in turn may have affected, or been affected by, domestic political changes within the involved parties. To answer these questions I have chosen to utilize both traditional historical methods as well international relations theory. From the early stages of my preliminary research it became obvious that many of the questions that were

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[3] Ibid., Book II.

appearing required perspectives that only certain theories of international relations could fully address. The main framework of IR theory that was highly applicable to the relationship among Rome, Persia, and Armenia is the balance of power theory. This theory puts forth the idea that changes in international power, like the conquest of a region, will elicit reactions that rebalance the system, thus maintaining stability.[4] Over the years, many scholars have contributed to the theory, which now more fully integrates the role played by small states in the relationships of their larger neighbors, a fact that makes balance of power highly applicable to the topic of this paper. Later in the paper, this basic explanation of the theory will be complicated by the unique set of issues attached to the ancient world and to Armenia, Persia, and Rome in particular.

The applicability of the balance of power theory to this topic becomes evident during the 3rd and 4th centuries when Rome and Persia consistently sought to gain an advantage over one another, and Armenia's geographical position made it a crucial staging point in these efforts. Each empire made repeated attempts during this period to dominate this important buffer zone, using both diplomatic means and military force to achieve their ends. These attentions gave Armenia a degree of influence greater than its small size would imply. Despite a certain amount of political disunity present in the nobility that ruled Armenia, the kingdom was still able to capitalize on the advantages presented by its unique role. In times of peace Armenia was an important link between Rome and the eastern trade, and in times of war both Persia and Rome preferred to have the troops of the Armenian nobles fighting under their banner rather than against it. Also, the Armenians themselves often played an active role in bringing their neighbors into

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4 'Balance of power' Microsoft Encarta Online Encyclopedia 2000 http://encarta.msn.com.

open conflict. In fact, on more than one occasion, the Armenians went on the offensive and invaded their neighbors' territory. At other times, the region's nobles would feign loyalty to one neighbor at the same time that they schemed with the other. When the Armenians were unsuccessful in playing Rome and Persia against each other and were forced to fight one or the other on their own, they fell back on unconventional tactics like night ambushes and clever use of the region's rugged geography in order to compete with much larger armies. These tools gave the Armenian rulers a fighting chance of preserving some degree of their sovereignty against two great powers determined to control them, and during the third and fourth centuries of the common era they wielded them relatively effectively. Thus, Armenia developed into what the balance of power theory considers a "balancer role", a state that shifts its support to whatever polity is strongest.[5] So in the periods when Rome controlled Armenia, the Persians attempted to break their hold as quickly as they were able so that the balance of power would not shift so far against them that Rome could feasibly launch a successful invasion, and vice versa. In the middle of all this was Armenia's relatively high degree of unity and strong desire for sovereignty, the latter of which served as the motivation for the role that the polity was to play. Thus, Armenian identity became tied in one way or another to whichever polity it supported politically at the time. This reality was reflected in the Armenian kingdom's conversion to Christianity at the start of the 4th century. The realities of the balance of power caused by Armenia's role as a buffer zone even played a part in the transition from Parthian to Sassanid rule in the Persian empire and the emergence of eastern despotism under the Dominate in the Roman empire.

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[5] ibid.

While conventional histiography has attributed changes in the relationship of Armenia, Rome, and Persia to the domestic transformations mentioned above, the reality is that there was an interdependent connection between domestic and international changes. Thus, Armenia's conversion to Christianity did not mean that its relationship with Rome was positive from then on, and the rise of the Sassanids does not solely explain renewed tensions between Rome and Persia. Instead, geopolitical concerns, many of them centering around control of Armenia, dictated the course of events in the region in the 3rd and 4th centuries, and played a role in the changing nature of each polity.

II. The Fun Stuff

The relationship of Persia, Armenia, and Rome is a long and complex one. In her overview of ancient Iranian history, *The Persians*, Maria Brosius points out how "...control of Armenia, a crucial buffer state, became a constant cause of strife and war."[6] Rome and Persia, at this time controlled by the Parthians, a non Persian ethnic group of formerly nomadic people, first made formal diplomatic contact in 97 B.C.E. As the two powers' territory came closer and closer together their relationship became increasingly hostile. Rome, both under the Republic and Empire, depicted the Parthians as ignorant barbarians; Tacitus called them "degenarate".[7] Yet despite these criticisms, the empire was never able to subdue the Parthians. Armenia comes into the picture in the first century B.C.E. as well, with the ill-fated campaigns of the Roman commander Lucullus. In an early parallel of what was to come later, Lucullus' attack on the Armenian king Tigranes, who was tied to the Parthians, led to the Armenians' calling on Parthia for help. After Lucullus, Pompey and Crassus entered into open conflict with the Parthians, and Crassus suffered a devastating defeat at Carrhae, where the famous "Parthian Shot" (horse archers who pretended to fall but turned and shot while riding away) was employed very effectively.[8]

Rome's transition to the imperial period saw continued strife with Parthia, and "Armenia remained the bone of contention between Rome and Parthia".[9] The two powers went back and forth between periods of peace and war for the next two hundred years, until the Parthian control of Persia collapsed and was raised by the Sassanids. Brosius,

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[6] Maria Brosius, *The Persians*, 82.
[7] Tacitus, Book II.
[8] ibid, 93-95.

along with most historians, contends that this collapse came about not because of Roman aggression, but was instead caused by internal pressures.[10] While this assessment is largely accurate, Brosius' description of Rome and Persian relations is subject to the same idea that Armenia was an inactive player that merely responded to the actions of its neighbors instead of actively participating in them.

Armenia gets the same treatment in the otherwise excellent overview of Sassanid-Roman relations from 224 to 363 B.C.E. by Dodgeon and Lee in *The Roman Eastern Frontier and Persian Wars*. Rome capitalized on the instability accompanying the rise to power of Ardashir and his Sassanid house by sending forces to buffer regions formerly under the influence of the Parthians, including Armenia, around 231. The Persians struck back in Syria in 240, and fighting continued in these regions for another 20 years.[11] Following the emperor Valerian's defeat at the city of Edessa, Roman power was greatly weakened in the buffer regions, and Roman influence in Armenia became almost nonexistent for most of the second half of the 3rd century.[12] Just as Brosius credits Persia's transition from Parthians to Sasanids for dramatically changing the nature of Roman-Persian relations, Dodgeon and Lee's introduction emphasizes the transition to the Dominate under Diocletian to be an important milestone in the relationship between the two states.[13] As described in *A History of the Roman People*, the Dominate was essentially the culmination of the "trend toward an absolute military monarchy…"[14] One would expect that such a dramatic change in the nature of Roman government would

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[9] ibid, 99.
[10] ibid, 101.
[11] Dodgeon and Lee, *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars*, 2.
[12] ibid, 8.
[13] ibid.

mean huge changes in Roman foreign policy, but as I will show, this was not necessarily the case.

Thus, the start of the 4th century saw a much different looking Rome facing off with an also domestically transformed Persia, with a recently Christianized Armenia in the middle. There is a relatively large body of literature on Armenia's conversion to Christianity, both ancient and modern, which can be attributed largely to the fact that it was the first kingdom to convert officially. The figures of King Trdat the Great and St. Gregory, the two figures responsible for the conversion in 301 C.E., are titanic and shrouded by religious fervor in the Armenian sources. Unsurprisingly, the Christian authors of the Armenian historical account regard the conversion as a seminal event in Armenian history. However for our purposes, there was relatively little change in the BoP system in the fourth century. Just as in the previous century, the Romans and Persians alternated between offensive military campaigns trying to lay claim to enough of the important border regions to gain an advantage over their rival. However, it is important to note that the Armenians were forced to use their own military forces to defend themselves more frequently during this period. The most important exchange between Rome and Persia in relation to Armenia took place towards the end of the century, when each attempted to insert its own puppet ruler but was rejected. As I will demonstrate later, this episode, like the rest of the third and fourth centuries, highlights the fact that maintaining sovereignty in the face of Roman and Persian aggression remained the primary goal of Armenia during the fourth century.

The primary source information on Armenian history was taken mostly from the

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[14] Allen Ward, Fritz Heichelheim, and Cedric Yeo. *A History of the Roman People, 4th ed.*, 420.

historians Buzund, Agathangelos, Seobos, and Moses Khorenats'I. The account of Khorenats'I is useful because of the vast time period that it covers, but modern historians have begun to aggressively challenge its reliability. In the first page of his introduction to Moses' *History of the Armenians*, translator Robert Thomson describes how the document's value is colored by the author's tendency to present events in a way that flattered his patrons and the possibility that the work may be much more recent than its purported 5th century date.[15] These factors make it difficult to rely very heavily on *History of the Armenians,* though it is still valuable for its insights into Armenian politics and the region's interactions with her neighbors. A much more useful account of the same period is the *Epic Histories* provided by the historian Pawstos Buganda's (Buzund). Buzund does indeed have some shortcomings, notably the fact that the account was composed towards the end of the 5th century and he did also glorify certain families as did Moses.[16] However, in her excellent translation, the preeminent Armenian historian Nina Garsoian also comments on the document in detail, helping to correct some of its inconsistencies and ultimately arguing very persuasively that Buzund's account is the most reliable, compared to Moses and the account by Agathangelos, for the third and fourth centuries. A second *History of the Armenians*, this one written by the author Agathangelos in the second half of the 5th century just like the aforementioned Moses' version, is not nearly as reliable as its peer of the same name. Agathangelos tended to adapt other texts to suit his purposes, even when the original subject matter was completely different.[17] The last

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15 Moses and Robert W. Thomson. 1978. *History of the armenians*. Harvard armenian texts and studies. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1.

16 P*awstos and Nina G. Garsoïan. 1989. *The epic histories attributed to p*awstos buzand (buzandaran patmut*iwnk*)*. Harvard armenian texts and studies. Cambridge, Mass.: Distributed for the Dept. of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, Harvard University by Harvard University Press, 11.

17 Agat*angeghos and Robert W. Thomson. 1976. *History of the armenians*. Albany: State University of

important primary source from the Armenian perspective is the account attributed to Seobos, and even though its emphasis is a alter period than what is considered in this paper, it still sheds light on Armenian culture and society following the conversion to Christianity.

Unsurprisingly, the Roman sources relevant to this topic are more numerous than their Armenian equivalents, and most are a little more reliable as well. The *Res gestae* of Ammianus Marcellinus is a fairly detailed source that provides excellent information on the general events in the Roman east during the fourth century, and is the most utilized Roman source in this paper. The Greek historian Herodian's work is also useful, for as the editors Michael Dodgeon and Samuel Lieu point out in their excellent primary source collection *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars AD 226-363*, he is "one of the most important sources for the history of the third century."[18] This is no shocking, considering he is one of the only extant sources. Dodgeon and Lieu also highlight how Herodian dovetails well with what we have of another Greek historian, Dio Cassius. This is because one of the missing sections of Dio's account is regarding the reign of Alexander Severus and his ill fated foray into Persia, something Herodian does cover.[19] Another useful albeit problematic source is the account of Paulus Orosius, an early 5th century church historian.[20] The last two books of his *Seven Books Against the Pagans* deal with material relevant to the discussion of the interactions among Armenia, Persia, and Rome. The relative immediacy of his writing to the events he was describing (at least

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New York Press, xvii.

[18] Dodgeon, Michael H. and Samuel N. C. Lieu. 2000. *The roman eastern frontier and the persian wars (ad 226-363) : A documentary history*. London: Routledge, x.

[19] ibid, ix.

[20] Orosius, Paulus and Roy J. Deferrari. 1964. *The seven books of history against the pagans*. Fathers of the church. Washington,: Catholic University of America Press, xv.

compared to the other authors mentioned thus far) makes him an excellent source, though his reliability is weakened by his arguement that Rome's Christianization id not lead to political and military weakness. There are other sources detailing the Roman perspective of events cited in this paper, including Athanasius, the Emperor Julian, Festus, Procopius, and others, though none are used as extensively as the above cited works. Altogether, the Roman primary sources are absolutely vital not only in examining the Empire's foreign policy in regard to Armenia and Persia, but also for the alternate perspective they provide in contrast to the Armenian sources.

The issues associated with Persian primary sources make those associated with their Roman and Armenian counterparts appears as minor road bumps, and few are utilized in this paper as they do not contain the level of detail necessary to extrapolate information regarding international systems issues. Adding to this, the number of Persian sources available for both the Parthian and Sasanian periods is sparse, and the quality of those that can be attained is very shaky. However, there are various inscriptions and a few extant papyri from the 3rd and 4th centuries. Also, historian Maria Brosius makes a point to mention the usefulness of a few Chinese sources that described Persia under Parthian rule, noting their refreshing lack of opinion, though the extent to which these are used in this paper is linked only to Brosius' own utilization.[21] The technical nature of these sources and their inaccessibility meant that I was forced to rely on filtered versions provided by primary source collections, chiefly the excellent *Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars* mentioned earlier. While I was forced to rely mainly on the work of other historians, and my inability to have direct access to more substantial primary

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[21] Brosius, Maria. 2006. *The persians : An introduction*. London ; New York: Routledge.

source evidence was frustrating, the breadth and quality of the secondary sources on Persia still allowed me to present a clear view of Persian foreign policy with respect to Rome and Armenia.

The events described earlier in this section can be examined from a purely historical perspective, but by also including relevant international relations theory their significance becomes more obvious. Though the use of international relations theory in this period is uncommon, it is still very applicable in an ancient historical context. The use of balance of power theory in this thesis makes it necessary to define the concept and explain why it can be applied to this topic. While there are numerous modern scholars who have contributed to current ideas about balance of power systems, for the purpose of keeping things straightforward (and because the primary purpose of this paper is historical anaylsis), I have chosen to use the work of preeminent international relations theorist Kenneth Waltz. In his seminal book *Theory of International Politics*, Waltz stated that there are only two conditions for a balance of power system to exist: "that the order be anarchic and that it be populated by units wishing to survive."[22] Therefore, according to Waltz's framework, the system of interactions among Rome, Persia, and Armenia during the third and fourth centuries was a balance of power system. In regards to the first condition about the anarchic nature of the order, this is a basic assumption of Waltz's theory and there is nothing about these ancient polities that invalidates the assumption for this period. In fact, it can be argued that Waltz's ideas are even more applicable to the ancient world considering there were fewer international organizations and laws in place than today. Secondly, as this paper will demonstrate, the units

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[22] Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 121.

populating this system all demonstrate a desire to "survive"[23], or maintain their sovereignty. This meant something different for Rome and Persia, two large multi-ethnic empires, than it did for the small and relatively homogeneous Armenia. For the empires' survival meant that they had to prevent their rival from gaining any sort of significant advantage, which controlling Armenia would have granted. On the other hand, survival for Armenia meant that it had to prevent both Rome and Persia from completely taking it over in an effort to damage the interests of the opposing empire.

Another critical aspect of Waltz's theory is his views on how to measure power. Waltz said that the rank of nations depends on the following: size of population and territory, resource endowment, economic capability, military strength, political stability, and competency."[24] Here is where this paper must deviate to some degree from the balance of power framework advocated by Waltz. While these factors can all be used to analyze the power of Rome and Persia and are helpful for explaining why these polities were so successful, they do not have nearly as much explanatory power when applied to a small ancient state such as Armenia. After all, with the exception possibly of political stability, Armenia could not possibly compete with its larger neighbors in any of the aforementioned categories, yet the polity was able to maintain a significant degree of independence in the face of near constant aggression by its neighbors for most of the third and fourth centuries. Moreover, Armenia was able to influence the policies of its larger neighbors to a varying degree throughout this period. Therefore, much of this paper revolves around highlighting the alternate measures of power that allowed Armenia to check its neighbors, including the use of unconventional military tactics and clever

[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid, 131.

diplomatic manipulation. While traditional theorists may not treat these sorts of tools on Armenia's proverbial belt as measures of power, the fact remains that they proved to be enormously effective means for a small state to influence the system.

While Robert Keohane argues that balance of power in the last half century has come to be associated with the neorealist framework created by Kenneth Waltz and put forth in his *Theory of International Politics* in 1979[25], the concept is really much older. Even though Waltz's framework is the one being utilized here, it is important to understand that despite the fact that he himself has not extensively applied the theory to the ancient world, there is a tradition of scholars who have. For example, balance of power ideology affected the foreign policy of the Italian city states of the 15th century, and through the work of Italian author Francesco Gucciardini the idea made its way to England where it influenced English policy towards France and Spain.[26] Scholars have even applied the theory to polities in ancient Ireland.[27] A useful historical perspective on the theory can be gained from Micheal Sheehan's *The Balance of Power: History and Theory*. This book does an excellent job of detailing how balance of power can be used in the field of history by examining the past actions of states in the international system. In the book, Sheehan points out that the theory has been attributed to the interactions of the Greek city states of Sparta and Athens by scholars like Morton Kaplan, and these studies were done in the late 1960s and are some of the few done involving late antiquity.[28] While Sheehan's work is good, he claims that there is little evidence that Greek or Roman writers ever conceived of an international relations framework the way we do

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[25] Robert O. Keohane; Kenneth N. Waltz, "The Neo Realist and His Critic", in *International Security,* vol. 25 no. 3, pp. 204.
[26] Michael Sheehan, *The Balance of Power: History & Theory* (Routledge, 2000)
[27] Sean Duke, *The Balance of Power in Ancient Ireland*, in vol. 278, no. 5337 of *Science,* p. 386.

today.[29] This seems somewhat false considering Thucydides did indeed conceptualize the relationship between Sparta and Athens as a balance of power system, and even advocated it.[30] However, even if Sheehan were correct, balance of power theory may still be applied to circumstances in late antiquity where it fits, such as in the case of Persia, Armenia, and Rome during the third and fourth centuries. Utilizing a modern theory to analyze the behavior of ancient states is not anachronistic, even if the people themselves did not conceptualize the nature of the system their polities were engaged in this way. Rather, the evidence that indicates that Armenia, Rome, and Persia were engaged in balance of power system means that relevant international theory can be fruitfully applied to the topic in a way that can enhance modern historians understanding of how these states interacted in the past.

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[28] Sheehan.

[29] ibid, 26.

[30] Brian Healy and Arthur Stein, *The Balance of Power in International History*, in *The Journal of Conflict*

III. We Go Way Back…

As I noted in the introduction introduction, understanding how the Armenians identified themselves is one of the first steps towards understanding the relationship between the international system and domestic issues in Rome, Persia, and Armenia. By the end of this paper, it will be clear that the significance of Armenian identity will be based not on the events that it can explain, but rather on the fact that later sections will show how little explanatory power these foreign influences have in relation to the polity's foreign policy. What I mean by this is that one of the main goals of this paper is to show that Armenia ultimately based its foreign policy decisions were on factors other than with whom it identified at the time. Since identity is always a complex issue, and because this paper is focused on issues relating to foreign policy and international relations, I am only including the more relevant examples of Roman and Persian influences on Armenia.

One of the most important aspects of Persian influence on Armenian society was the Parthian ancestry of some of the powerful noble families, including the Arcasids. Moses Khorenats'I makes this link in *History of the Armenians,* and other ancient authors make the same assertion.[31] Even after the Parthians had lost control of the Persian empire, family ties between the Persian nobility and its Armenian counterpart still existed. Dodgeon and Lee have selected one such example from Agathangelos, which explains how the Persian king Artashir was kind to a certain noble named Atway, who was related to Atrashir through marriage.[32] There are no equivalent familial relations between the Armenians and the Romans described by the sources, despite the fact that the

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Resolution, Vol. 17, no. 1 (March 1973), pp. 33-61. Accessed from http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0022-

[31] Khorenatsi, 68, pp. 214.

[32] Aganthangelos in Dodgeon and Lee, *The Roman Eastern Frontier and Persian Wars,* 317.

sources are clearly biased in favor of the Romans. The presence of these familial ties between Armenia and Persia also hints at another identity related issue: culture. After all, if people were exchanged between the two regions, it is likely that cultural traditions were as well, meaning that Armenian culture had strong Persian influences.

Nina Garsoian describes this aspect of Persian influence as a "deep Iranian strain in Armenian society and institutions" and goes on to say that Armenia was not "altogether foreign to the Persian."[33] Though the Armenian sources tend to downplay these Persian influences because of their "ecclesiastical nature",[34] they are still rife with evidence of Perisan culture in Armenia. One of the clearest signs that can be found in Buzund is the way he discusses the organization of the region as a whole. Throughout the *Epic Histories*, Buzund uses terms like "satrap" and "district" to describe different polities, including Greater Armenia. Anyone familiar with the Persian Empire knows that these are terms that are linked to the imperial administration of the provinces, as a satrap was a Persian governor. The phonetic similarity between the Persian term satrap and the Armenian word for "the marshal of Greater Armenia",[35] sparapet, is also a striking piece of evidence. Another cultural link between Armenia and Persia during the third century was religion, as many Armenians were Zoroastrians before the conversion to Christianity. Our evidence for this can be seen in Buzund's description of the destruction of the pagan temples, which all have similar attributes that seem to match up to those of Zoroastriansim.

Armenian identification with Rome began around the start of the fourth century after both polities became Christian. Following this, most secondary literature has

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[33] Garsoian, "Armenia in the Fourth Century", pp. 342.
[34] Ibid.

essentially connected the two at the hip, and the dichotomy of the Christian states against the heathen Persians is certainly a strong one. There were other connections between the two however, and Garsoian points out Rome's long-standing relationship with the southern parts of Armenia. According to Garsoian, the Roman Empire granted these polities *foederatae liberae et immunes*, meaning that they were almost completely autonomous and did not even pay taxes.[36] This means that the nobles in these southern portions had their own armies and relationship with Rome, which only required that they maintain a foreign policy in line with that of the Empire. Clearly, there were some portions of Armenia that did not only have strong religious connections to Rome, but possessed an even older legal relationship with their western neighbor.

As will be demonstrated through examples in later sections, these religious, cultural, and social connections that Armenia had to both Rome and Persia during the third and fourth centuries do not explain the behavior of the polity. Armenia fought Persia at a time when many of its people were Zoroastrian and its kings had blood ties to their neighbors. In turn, Armenia also fought Rome even after both were Christian and had developed religious and institutional ties. Clearly, we must look towards some other factor to explain Armenia's role in the balance of power system, as issues of identity do not provide the full picture in this case, despite the emphasis they are often given by ancient historians.

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[35] Garsoian, *The Epic Histories*, pp 560.

IV. A Country For Old Men

When examining Armenia's relationship with Rome and Persia from a balance of power perspective, it is important to note that Armenia of the 3rd and 4th centuries was not the type of unified and centralized polity to which the framework is generally applied. After all, as mentioned earlier, the balance of power framework was developed in relation to the modern nation state. But just as this small degree of disjuncture does not make the use of balance of power inapplicable (especially considering that the modern world has polities without united structures), neither does the fact that the Armenian polity was not a nation in our modern sense. Traditional thought is that the nation state is a concept born in the modern era. Ancient polities are rarely considered nations because of the relative weakness of their governments and the fact that the subjects of these governments generally identified themselves by religion, ethnicity, or even profession more than they did based on any perceived national identity, if they even had one. However, scholar Steven Grosby has complicated this common conception with his article "Borders, Territory, and Nationality in the Ancient Near East and Armenia". In the article, Grosby states that "examination of evidence from the ancient near East and Armenia, spanning a period of more than a thousand years, indicates the existence of conceptions of relatively precise boundaries, territories, and perhaps nations."[37]

When I refer to Armenia as a distinct polity, I am referring to what was called Greater Armenia by many ancient authors. As Grosby points out in his article, Greater

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[36] Garsoian, 344.

[37] Grosby, Steven. "Borders, Territory, and Nationality in the Ancient Near East and Armenia". Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient. 1997. 1.

Armenia was a distinct political entity with fairly stable and precise borders.[38] However, Grosby also makes note of the feudal system of the naxrars, as well as the fact that Rome had annexed parts of Western Armenia and the Persians had influence in the east. This dichotomy is a little simplistic, as the rulers of Greater Armenia often stretched their influence into these areas, only to lose it to an aggressive response by one of its neighbors. While some might argue that these factors limit the degree that we may call Armenia a nation, it is possible to see them from a perspective of national unity. The modern parallel to this would be the efforts of Germany to lay claim to the regions of its neighbors that had high proportions of Germans living there, and these actions were indeed seen as aggressively nationalistic. Ultimately Grosby's work shows that it is not only possible to consider Armenia as a relatively united polity, it is absolutely necessary.

At first glance, the feudal nature of Greater Armenia would seem to be a serious problem when attempting to show that a desire for sovereignty dominated Armenia's foreign policy decisions and even affected domestic transformations such as the region's conversion to Christianity. However, even a cursory examination of the Armenian historical accounts reveals two themes that help us understand why the polity generally made unified foreign policy decisions, even if it did change those policies fairly often. The first theme is tied to a tradition of strong executive leaders, whether they were ordained kings or powerful naxrars (Armenian nobles) who led in the absence of the former. The second theme relates to the Armenian nobility's ability to unite during times of crisis, and it appears during those times when the executive leadership had been compromised for some reason.

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[38] ibid, 17.

The first and most obvious example of a powerful Armenian king who was able to unite the region and maintain its sovereignty was Trdat, the famed leader who oversaw the conversion to Christianity at the start of the 4th century. Due to the obvious veneration showered upon him by the Christian Armenian historians from the 5th century on, we must take all accounts of him with an extra grain of salt. Nevertheless, even after one shifts through the religious adulation of the sources, it is clear that Trdat was able to bring the naxrars under his control, which in turn allowed him to play a strong, direct role in the Roman-Persian relationship, something that will be discussed later. For now, we will focus on the evidence relating to his dominance of the feudal system. The account of Agathangelos depicts Trdat as a man of great physical strength who dominated Armenia by force of will. However, Agathangelos' account also makes mention of a Roman army that the Emperor had put at Trdat's disposal for his return to Armenia from Roman territory in the East, likely Constantinople.[39] Clearly this Roman army allowed Trdat to control the Armenian nobles, and his ability to use Roman support without becoming completely subject to foreign control is a testament to good executive leadership. Also, Trdat's conversion of Armenia to Christianity demonstrates that he was a powerful leader, since the religion did remain dominant in the region. Agathangelos attributes the conversion almost completely to the works of St. Gregory, and depicts Trdat negatively in much of the conversion process,[40] but it is unlikely that Gregory could have possibly been successful without the support of the king. Only another powerful and dynamic king, Pap, was able to bring Armenia away from Christianity for a brief period time, as will be discussed in a later section.

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[39] Agathangelos, 61.

Kings were not the only examples of strong executive leadership in Armenia during the 3rd and 4th centuries. The polity had a strong tradition of powerful nobles who, while serving as sparapet, a sort of high vizier of sorts, actually became more powerful than the kings that they ostensibly served. One such figure was Musel Mamikonean, whose house traditionally held this position. As the ranking member of his family according to the naxrar traditions, Musel also inherited this position from his father.[41] It was Musel who put Pap on the throne and before the new king became established Musel reconquered many territories that Greater Armenia had previously lost control over. The next head of the Mamikonean house, Manuel, became an even more powerful leader of Armenia through his position as the most powerful naxrar, ruling for many years before deciding to instate a new king. This tradition of a single powerful noble who would aid the king or even supplant him if he became compromised by weakness or was too far under the sway of the Romans or Persians meant that Armenia was rarely bereft of a strong central authority.

Even on those rare occasions in which there was no dominant figure in the polity, the Armenian naxrars were still able successfully to steer foreign policy during delicate periods in the balance of power system. This was largely thanks to the numerous councils of nobles that met during times of crisis described by Buzund and the other authors. During one such crisis following King Pap's mismanagement of Greater Armenia and his untimely death, the naxrars found themselves facing the possibility of a hostile Rome and Persia. Realizing that they could not face both powers at that time, the nobles decided to let the Romans' killing of their king go unavenged in order to rebuild a relationship with

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[40] ibid, 271.

their Western neighbor so that they would not be subject to Persian dominance.[42] Later councils of the naxrars empowered Musel and his successor Manuel to push back against foreign encroachments. In each instance, the naxrars were able to meet quickly and arrive at a consensus about what course of action was best for Armenia. The fact that the nobles usually abided by these decisions instead of brokering their own agreements with Rome and Persia lends credence to the idea that Armenians had some sense of national identity, and it also meant that even without a strong executive at the helm the polity was able to navigate the sometimes unstable balance of power system.

Another relevant example of an individual using strong executive power in Armenia was the figure of Vasak. Vasak was the highest naxrar in Greater Armenia and commander of the armies like Musel and Manuel. However, Vasak is interesting because he exercised a great deal of power during the reign of a king who is treated as competent by the sources: Arsak. Buzund describes almost twenty instances of Persian armies, ranging in size from a few thousand to four million men, being routed or destroyed by Armenian forces led by Vasak.[43] Obviously Vasak is a heroic figure in Buzund's account, as these victories are exaggerated quite a bit. The fact that Arsak's commander was in charge of these victories is a hint at possible weakness in the king, or at an aspect of Vasak's character that we have too little information to discern. Either way, Vasak is yet another example of strong Armenian leadership taking a commanding control of the countries strategy towards the actions of its powerful neighbors during the third and fourth centuries.

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[41] Garsoian, 393.
[42] Buzund, 214.
[43] Buzund, Book IV, pp156-161.

What these examples collectively show is that Armenia, more specifically Greater Armenia, alternately had either a strong enough central figure or a swift enough consensus among the naxrars to effectively steer the polity in its dealings with Rome and Persia. There are of course some examples of Armenian nobles who broke off and sided with whichever power was the enemy during that period,[44] but these men were ultimately outliers that did not drastically alter the balance of power system in the region. In her article "Armenia in the Fourth Century: An Attempt to Redefine the Concepts Armenia and Loyalty", Nina Garsoian attacks the treatment of Armenia as a single unified political entity. In support of this claim she argues that those nobles, like Meruzan, treated as traitors for dissenting from the general consensus of the naxrars as to which empire to support at any given time may have been acting on behalf of the Southern Satrapies, which had different interests than Greater Armenia in the North.[45] Garsoian's article complicates our image of Armenia with its attention to the complicated realties of the Armenian region in the fourth century. Nevertheless, it still concedes that the northern kingdom was a relatively unified polity with some sort of national identity. Whether or not this national identity applied at all to the southern parts of Armenia is an interesting but unnecessary and difficult question to address. Ultimately, the fact that a large portion of Armenia did have a domestic power structure that allowed it to behave as a coherent actor in the region's balance of power system is crucial to the rest of this thesis, as it lays the foundation for considering Armenia as an active party in the Roman-Persian

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[44] The most notable example of these few examples was Meuzan, an Armenian noble described in depth by Buzund who supposedly defected to the Persians and consistently goaded them into attacking Armenia. Meruzan is so thoroughly vilified that he almost fulfills the role of a sort of arch nemesis to the Armenian leaders. Buzund, Book IV.

[45] Garsoian, "Armenia in the Fourth Century: An Attempt to Redefine the Concepts Armenia and Loyalty" in *Armenia between Byzantium and the Sasanians*, 345.

relationship.

V. Armenia, the Most Fickle Neighbor in History

Most of the primary source evidence regarding Armenia's role in Roman-Persian relations pertains to the military clashes between the two superpowers. As we can see from both local and Roman historians, Armenia played a variety of roles in these conflicts during the third and fourth centuries, ranging from being a military rallying point, a site for key battles, and a region whose treacherous mountainous geography wreaked casualties on Roman and Persian armies alike. Whatever the situation may have been for each individual war, the one role Armenia did not play in the Roman-Persian conflicts is the one that secondary literature has consistently given it: that of a inactive territory that had no say whatsoever in the actions of its larger neighbors. In his article "The Roman Empire vs. Persia, 363-502: A Study of Successful Deterrence," Vern Bullough describes Armenia as "a sort of buffer state which was of strategic importance."[46] Though this assessment does accurately sum up Armenia's importance to its neighbors, Bullough's analysis treats the region as a piece of meat being fought over by two dogs. As this section will show, this treatment runs contrary to historical reality, as Armenian kings and nobility attempted to play an active role in whatever way they saw as necessary to preserving their sovereignty during times of war between Rome and Persia, even if these attempts were occasionally nullified by the overwhelming force that their neighbors could bring forth militarily. Buzund himself best describes the general situation that the Armenians found themselves in Book V with his quotation of a Naxrar council: "We cannot become servants of the heathen Persians or be hostile to the king of the Greeks (i.e. the Romans). Neither can we carry on hostilities with the both of them.

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[46] Vern Bullough, "The Roman Empire Vs. Persia, 363-502: A Study of Successful Deterrence." *Journal*

Nor can we maintain ourselves without the support of one of them."[47] In fact, sometimes it was Armenia that brought its neighbors into conflict in a manner designed to check the expansionist tendencies that each empire demonstrated from time to time. These instances in which Armenia convinced one of its neighbors to confront the other contradict the standard depiction of the Roman-Persian conflicts as battles initiated by the two powers themselves, and highlight one of the primary tools Armenia utilized to keep itself afloat: solicitation.

Analyzing whom Armenia chose to solicit for aid during the third and fourth centuries also provides crucial insight into the pressures that dictated foreign policy for small states in antiquity. Section III addressed the Persian and Roman influences on Armenian society. While these factors are important in this discussion because of the role they played in domestic Armenian politics, they are incapable of explaining why the Armenians chose to side with one empire over the other in any given instance. Instead international pressures dictated with whom Armenia sided. When Rome was encroaching on their territory, the naxrars sent envoys to the Persians, and vice versa. Even when there was no direct military threat pending, Armenia tended to support whatever power could help it remain sovereign, which was generally the weaker power in the region due to the fact that influence in Armenia was a critical factor. This situation, in which Armenia's sovereignty was linked to the shifting relationship of its neighbors meant that Armenia had a vested interest in maintaining a balance of power between Rome and Persia, thus making Armenia a balancer state. Looking at the relationship among the three polities from this angle explains why Armenia sided with Persia in some instances, even after its

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of Conflict Resolution 7, no. 1(1963), in *JSTOR* [database online], accessed January 7th, 2008

[47] Pawstos Buzund, *The Epic Histories,* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989) 214.

conversion to Christianity, or why the pagan naxrars of the pre-conversion years sometimes accepted Roman intervention with open arms despite being culturally similar to the Persians. This behavior fits into modern balance of power systems, as was seen with the numerous small states that alternated between Communist and capitalist systems in order to garner support from the Soviet Union or the United States during the Cold War.

Since most of the ancient sources focus on times of militarily conflict or religious struggle, most of the following examples are directly related to cases of solicitation tied to wartime. As Dodgeon and Lee point out in the second appendix of their primary source collection, *The Epic Histories* of Buzund are full of grand battles between the Armenians and the Persians in which almost always the Armenians emerge victorious.[48] Historical reality must have looked much different, as the size of the armies that Armenian kings would have been able to muster was much smaller than those the larger, more populous Persian Empire was capable of fielding. Thus, it was very likely that the Armenians often had foreign aid in their battles, a fact that is only sometimes made clear by the ancient authors. For example, in this passage the Armenian King Trdat is described as having sent envoys to the "Greek King Konstandidos" in his "Imperial Palace."[49] Buzund here is obviously referring to the Emperor Constantine, who reigned from Constantinople at the same time as King Trdat (the beginning of the fourth century) and who would have appreciated the fact that Trdat by this point had converted to Christianity. As the Persian King Nerseh invaded Armenia, Constantine leads Roman armies, supported by Armenian forces, into battle, subsequently driving out Nerseh. While details of the account are

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48 Dodgeon, Michael H. and Samuel N. C. Lieu. 2000. *The roman eastern frontier and the Persian wars (ad 226-363) : A documentary history*. London: Routledge, 300-303.

questionable, especially the idea that Constantine personally led these armies, this episode clearly demonstrates that an Armenian king asked for Roman help during a period when Armenia had become increasingly partial to the Romans due both to the Greater Armenia's conversion to Christianity and the end of Parthian control in Persia. As we will see later in a later section however, these domestic changes in Armenia and Persia that altered Greater Armenia's relationship with Rome are in part functions of the balance of power system. It is also interesting to note that this particular encounter between Rome and Persia is given a relatively minor treatment, if any, in the Roman sources. This means that it was not seen as a particularly important exchange by contemporary Roman authors, as neither Marcellinus or Herodian describe it, and yet it was obviously viewed as critical by the Armenians judging by Buzund's treatment. All of these facts stemming just from this first passage create a contrast with the typical historical description which depicts the Romans and Persians as fighting their battles against each other regardless of any Armenian agenda. Instead, Buzund's account reveals one instance in which Armenian's were actually were *the root* of confrontation between the Empires, and not just simple bystanders.

An earlier example of Armenia's soliciting the Romans for help comes from Moses Khorenats'I. This example involves Armenian King Khosrov and his invasion of Persian territory in Assyria. It is interesting the Armenians are actually going on the offensive against the much larger Persians, something not seen in other cases. Khorenats'I describes how Khosrov requested aid from the Emperor Phillip sometime in

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[49] ibid, 306.

the third century between 244 and 249 (Phillip's reign) for an attack on the Persians.[50] However, in this case, the Empire was too stressed from internal issues and problems with the Germanic tribes to provide any of its actual legions, so Philip gave him a letter allowing him to raise troop from different regions in the empire. With these troops Khosrov went on to conquer much of Assyria. It is also important to note that when Khosrov continued the assault without the aid of Rome later on, he ended up dead., this showing the inability of the Armenians to pursue aggressive actions against the Persians without even nominal Roman support. While the details are muddled and many are likely false, as Khorenats'I claims that Khosrov continued to win victories over the Persians, it is only after he no longer had direct imperial support that Khosrov was deposed.[51] This episode illuminates two further aspects of Armenian solicitation that are not made obvious by the other examples used in this section. First, the fact that Khosrov went on the offensive against Persia not only shows that Armenia was an active player in the balance of power between its larger neighbors, that he did so during one of the Roman empire's weakest moments lends credence to the argument that Armenian rulers actively tried to maintain the balance of power. While Khorenats'I cites the standard causes, like familial vengeance, that Armenian sources often feature (see Background), it is unlikely to be coincidenctal that Armenia undertook one of its boldest campaigns against Persia when Rome was at its weakest. Instead, it makes perfect sense that Khosrov would be forced to take bold action to knock Persian expansion back when Rome was incapable of openly challenging its rival on its own. This case is also critical because this was a period when Armenian rulers had the most in common with the Persians, including some blood

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50 Moses Khorenats'I, 218.

ties as described by Aganthangelos. The fact that they still chose to solicit the Romans means that cultural affinity played a minimal role in Khosrov's decision making.

Another series of accounts from Buzund regarding solicitation and highlighting how domestic issues were subordinate to the goal of maintaining Armenian sovereignty begins around the year 369 and centers around the figure of King Pap. Armenia had just been devastated by the Persians under King Shapur, and Pap's father, King Arsak, had been imprisoned and executed while much of the region was put to the torch. At the start of Book V of the *Epic Histories*, Buzund describes how King Pap was crowned by the Greek King, a reference to the current Roman Emperor, Valens.[52] This was done upon the request of one of the more powerful Armenian nobles, Musel. Following the enthronement of Pap, the "king of the Greeks gave them great support, sending to Armenia together with Pap a *stratelat* named Terent and a certain count Ade with six million men."[53] While this figure is clearly fiction, the important aspect of this passage is the fact that Armenia had once again successfully solicited Roman aid against Persia in a situation in which the Romans had not made a move on their own. While this is another important example of Armenia playing a critical role as an instigator of Roman-Persian conflict, it is not surprising considering the earlier example of such an occurrence during the reign of Constantine. The significance of this historical thread becomes evident later on Book V, when King Pap begins to come into conflict with the chief patriarch of the Christian church in Armenia, Nerses.

Patriach Nerses I the Great was a critical figure in 4th century Armenian history,

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51 ibid., 219-222.

52 Pawstos Buzund, *The Epic Histories* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989) 306.

53 ibid., 185.

as he was tightly connected to many of the important events in the second half of that century. In the prosopographical appendix of her translation of Buzund's *Epic Histories*, Garsoian extensively describes the details of Nerses' life, but spends little time on the hostility between the patriarch and Pap.[54] By using Buzund's account in conjunction with that of the Roman historian Ammainus Marcellinus however, the motivations behind the struggle between these two figures become clear. Buzund describes how King Pap, along with his commander Musel, was able to use the legions given to him by the Romans to drive the Persians out of Armenia. Musel then consolidated the power of the king by conquering the Armenian territories that had been lost in the Roman-Persian treaty of 363.[55] This consolidation of power and the victory over the Persians that stemmed from Musel's successful solicitation of Roman aid seems as if it would have brought stability to Armenia for at least a few years. However, the strife that emerged between Nerses the Great and King Pap eventually drove the King to renounce Christianity and solicit a powerful neighbor once again, although this time it was Persia.

Buzund situates the issues between Pap and Nerses in an almost entirely religious context. According to Buzund, Pap "wallowed in filth" by participating in homosexual acts and using pagan magic.[56] In this account, Nerses opposed Pap because of his sins and his lack of devotion to Christianity. Here Nina Garsoian's warning about the religious character of the important Armenian histories suggests that we must not view them soley as national histories. If that were the case, then the varying authors' negative treatment of

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54 ibid., 395.
55 ibid., 199-201.
56 ibid., 203.

Pap would be difficult to understand.[57] Although religious concerns were undoubtedly of primary importance for 5th century Armenian historians, Buzund's account is still valuable for information regarding the non-religious source of conflict between Nerses and Pap. Instead it just means that the reader must pick up on details that are treated as afterthoughts by Buzund and recognize them for their significance. One such crucial nugget of information in the *Epic Histories* is seen in the following quote: "But because of the king of the Greeks, he [Pap] did not dare insult him [Nerses] openly even in words, or dare do anything against him, or cause his death."[58] Here Buzund actually indicates that Nerses was protected by the Romans, and that Pap's use of Roman aid in expelling the Persians had unintended consequences. Nerses had developed strong connections with the Roman empire, despite the fact that the Armenian church did not always see eye to eye with Roman Christian leaders. This connection can be seen in Moses Khorenats'i's history, where Nerses meets with a Roman official, dissuades him from invading Armenia and negotiates the return of hostages, all during the reign of Pap's father.[59] The connection of a strong domestic figure like Nerses with the Roman Empire would have been a threat to Pap's sovereignty, because control over such a figure gave Rome direct influence in Armenia. Additionally, in the process of reconsolidating the power of Pap's kingdom by invading the independent kingdoms (rebellious and otherwise), Musel may have stepped upon some figurative Roman toes. As mentioned earlier, the Armenian region as a whole was by no means a unified polity, and according to Adontz, Rome had

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[57] Nina Garsoian, "Armenia in the Fourth Century -AN Attempt to Redefine the Concepts 'Armenia' and 'Loyalty' in *Armenia between Byzantium and the Sasanians* (London: Variorum Reprints, 1985), 342.

[58] Buzund, *The Epic Histories*, 203.

[59] Moses Khorenats'I, *History of the Armenians* (London: Harvard University Press, 1978) 276.

developed some degree of power over the independent southern areas.[60] Buzund's description provides little information on the location of the independent kingdoms that Musel invaded, but some of them were probably in the Roman sphere of influence as Armenia is not a particularly large region and the Arcasid kings (Pap included) already controlled a sizeable portion of it. Thus, while religious motivations may have played a role in the antagonism between Pap and Nerses, it seems more likely that Pap's main concern was the connection that Nerses had with the Romans and what that could mean for his rule.

With these issues in mind we can now examine Pap's decision to seek an alliance with Persia from an international relations perspective. In their campaigns to drive out the Persians following the devastating invasion of Shapur in the 360's, Pap and Musel relied heavily on Roman aid. While the victories they achieved served to restore the Arcasid kingdom, they also upset the balance of power in favor of Rome. This situation, especially when combined with Roman influence over the powerful figure of Nerses, threatened Pap's attempts to rebuild an independent Armenia. Thus, the only option left to the king for curbing Roman power in the region was to solicit the Persians and attempt to remove the growing signs of Roman encroachment. Pap attempted do these things in a diplomatic nature, as he requested that the Romans return several Armenian cities to his control and agreed to meet with their commanders still in Armenia.[61] After a series of meetings and a period of captivity, Pap was eventually killed by Roman officials. Ammianus Marcellinus described these same events from the Roman perspective, and he

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[60] Nicholas Adontz, *Armenia in the Period of Justinian* , N. Garsoian tr. (Louvain-Lisbon, 1970), 7-74; taken from Nina Garsoian, "Armenia in the Fourth Century -AN Attempt to Redefine the Concepts 'Armenia' and 'Loyalty' in *Armenia between Byzantium and the Sasanians* , 343.

[61] Buzund, 213.

viewed Pap's (or Para as he calls him) death as shameful.[62] Marcellinus also writes that the Persian king Shapur was "terribly grieved" at the news, because he had been "earnestly laboring to win to his own alliance".[63] This series of events reveals that Armenia's decisions regarding whom to ask for help were based not on which neighbor they identified with more at the time, but instead revolved around which power they saw as the greatest threat to their independence. Pap's decision to renounce Christianity during this period and attack Church institutions was likely an attempt to engender himself to the Persians, and not based on sheer jealousy as Buzund argues.[64] This willingness to change the kingdom's faith in order to court an ally highlights the fact that identity was beholden to security decisions, and not vice versa. As Maria Brosius aptly put it in *The Persians*, "pro-Roman attitudes seldom penetrated deeply below the political surface."[65]

Following Pap's death in 374, the Armenian nobles held council and decided to ally themselves with Rome instead of Persia.[66] The Romans then sent a relative of Pap named Varazdat to Armenia to become their puppet king. The fact that Varazdat was not already in Armenia suggests that he had been raised in part of the Roman Empire, possibly as a hostage, meaning that he was truly the Emperor's man. This may have been why Varazdat killed the enormously successful commander Musel, who had been Pap's right hand man.[67] While Buzund writes that it was the council of men envying Musel's

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62 Ammianus Marcellinus, *Roman History* (London: Bohn, 1862), 543-575.
63 ibid.
64 Buzund, 211.
65 Brosius, 92.
66 Buzund., 214.
67 ibid., 215.

position that convinced Varazdat to kill Musel,[68] the fact that Musel had done much to help Pap in wresting control of the region away from the Romans could have motivated Varazdat's Roman allies to rid themselves of a potential threat. Unsurprisingly, the Armenian nobles soon began to chafe under the rule of the Roman puppet king, and under the guidance of the new Commander Manuel beseeched Persia for aid.[69] After Varazdat had been removed and Roman control had been greatly weakened, Manuel then turned on his Persian allies in an attempt to maintain Armenian sovereignty. When it became clear that the Persians were in a weak position, Manuel ejected them in a series of battles mentioned in the next section, and managed to maintain Armenian independence til his death. This final episode, which came towards the end of the fourth century is possibly the most representative of how Armenia used solicitation in order to maintain the balance of power in the region, thus leading to their continued freedom.

Just as the Armenians solicited aid from their neighbors to maintain their own agenda, so too did their neighbors come to them looking for help based on circumstances in the balance of power system. Ammianus Marcellinus describes how the Emperor Constantius (337-361) courted King Arsak II of Armenia:

> And because, as the king of Persia had been compelled unwillingly to fall back on account of the difficulties of the winter, it was feared that as soon as the weather became open he would return with greater impetuosity than ever, ambassadors were sent to the kings and satraps across the Tigris, with splendid presents, to advise and entreat them all to join us, and abstain from all designs or plots against us....But the most important object of all was to win over Arsaces and Meribanes, the kings of Armenia and Hiberia, who were conciliated by the gift of magnificent and honourable robes and by presents of all kinds, and who could have done great harm to the Roman interests if at such a crisis they had gone over to the Persians.[70]

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[68] ibid.

[69] ibid, 221.

These two passages clearly show that Constantius had security priorities in mind, as he was concerned about the Roman Empire's capability to combat the Persians at the same time that it was dealing with issues on its Western frontiers. In order to alleviate this situation, Constantius used gifts to woo the Armenian king in order to win his support against the Persians. In her prosopographical appendix to the *Epic Histories*, Nina Garsoian points out that this tactic must have been effective, as Arsak II remained a loyal Roman ally who even helped Julian in his ill-fated campaigns against the Persians in 363.[71] This is yet another example, albeit of a different type, of an Armenian ruler using solicitation to the advantage of the polity.

Each of these episodes involving solicitation, despite the unique circumstances surrounding them, highlights several common themes in the relations among Persia, Armenia, and Rome. First, they show that security concerns overrode commonalities in religion and culture. This explains why Christian Armenian rulers were willing to change faiths in order to garner support from Persia when the Roman Empire was beginning to encroach more than they were willing to accept, or why pre-Christian nobles sometimes sided with the Romans despite their strong ties to Persian culture. Secondly, each episode in some way highlights the fractured nature of the region. This lack of centralization is what created much of the complexity in this period of history, a fact that was evident in those instances where one group of nobles asked Rome for help while another solicited Persia. The relative lack of unity meant that the security interests of Armenian nobles sometimes strayed far enough apart for them to see different benefactors as their key to dominance. The final theme that emerges from the Armenian cases of solicitation is that

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[70] Marcellinus, Book XXI, 8-9.

of Armenia's role as a balancer state. From Tiradtes the first Christian king to Pap who renounced his faith, Armenian rulers consistently saw the balance of power between Rome and Persia as vital to their independence. They also clearly understood their crucial role as the middle ground between the two powers, and they played this bargaining chip in solicitations as much as they could in an attempt to maintain the balance of power.

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[71] Garsoian, 352.

VI. Armenia, the Trickiest Neighbor in History

The accounts of Faustus, Moses Khorenatsi, and Agathagelos all contain similar descriptions of grand triumphs over invading armies (usually Persians or pagans due to the religious motivations of each of these authors) that we find in Buzund's *Epic Histories* . As was mentioned in the last section, the historical accuracy of these accounts can be challenged since Armenian nobles could probably not consistently field armies capable of contesting with those of their larger neighbors. Moreover, relying solely on solicitation to play the two empires against each other was clearly unwise considering the fickle behavior demonstrated by Roman and Persian rulers toward Armenia. Thus, the Armenians were forced to utilize other unconventional strategies in order to maintain their sovereignty in the face of their neighbors who dwarfed them in the standard measures of power (I.e. military size, economic strength). These circumstance explain why the Armenians sometimes adopted the strategy of "dirty" tactics. Though the sources do not emphasize these types of actions, there are still an astonishing amount of references to ambushes, early forms of intelligence gathering, and other examples of "dirty" tactics. While the Armenians did not wage what we would consider today as a full on guerilla war, some of their strategies can be seen as a late antiquity parallel to some modern conflicts that have been termed as "low intensity."

To establish what tactics can be considered conventional, we must first look at what the literature has said about the subject. In his book *The Roman Army at War 100 BC to 200 AD*, Adrian Goldsworthy discusses the basics of Roman army organization and tactics, as well as those of their primary enemies during the period. In the book, Goldsworthy emphasizes that the strategy of the Roman army was primarily defensive in

nature. As Goldsworthy puts it, "It (the Roman army) paid obsessive attention to entrenching its position and so denied itself mobility."[72] Thus, it is unsurprising that the Romans did so badly against the highly mobile horse archers of the Parthians. The primary lesson to be taken from Goldsworthy is that the Roman army was designed for occupation and decisive, mid to large scale encounters. Tactics such as night raids and the like do not fit into the general Roman military strategy at the start of the 3rd century. Still it is difficult to pin down a firm set of principles guiding warfare in late antiquity from just secondary literature. All we can tell is that the Romans may not have participated in ambushes, night raids, or intelligence gathering on a regular occasion because it was not part of their operational doctrine, and also that they themselves were vulnerable to such tactics. Any discussion of Persian military tactics ultimately mentions one primary factor: numbers. Whether it be the Persian army at Thermopolyae or those described by the Armenian sources, the one common theme is that the Persians consistently attempted to use overwhelming numbers.

This does not mean the aforementioned tactics were unheard of in the ancient world. What is unique about the Armenian sources and their mention of these strategies is the fact they are not discussed in a negative light and they are fairly frequent. Normally, descriptions of tactics like these in the accounts of ancient authors were attributed to the enemy and described in a negative manner, as open battle was usually seen as the honorable path. This is the case in an episode described by Ammianus Marcellinus in Book 19 of his histories. On this particular occasion, a group of people known as the Limingantes of Sarmatia, attacked the emperor Constantius in the province of Valeria.

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[72] Goldsworthy, Adrian. *The Roman Army at War 100 BC to 200 AD*, 76.

They used trickery by pretending to sue the emperor for peace so that they were allowed to enter into his camp unhindered, and then from there proceeded to attack with the Emperor and his forces only barely able to drive them off. Marcellinus states that as the battle began to turn in favor of the Romans, they were motivated to kill every single Lmingantes because of the perceived treachery of their tactics: "And because in their fiery valour our men were resolved to wipe out disgrace by glory, and were full of anger at the treachery of the foe, they slew every one whom they met without mercy," [73] So even though the secondary literature does not decisively tell us whether or not the Romans approved of certain types of trickery and the like, primary source authors leave no doubt as to the fact that Romans did indeed look down on such strategies, at least when they were used by the enemy. While the Armenians glorified open battle, none of the authors belittle less noble tactics used by Armenian commanders or their enemies in the same way that Roman authors like Marcellinus do. Therefore, when I call these tactics unusual or unconventional, I am doing so from a Roman military perspective. It is difficult to achieve a Persian perspective on these tactics utilized by the Armenians, simply because we do not have the primary sources for it and secondary analysis of Persian tactics is not enough in this case.

One of the more interesting examples of these tactics also involves an Armenian solicitation of the Romans. In Buzund's account, not only did the Emperor Constantine send troops to the region upon the request of the nobles, he personally participated in this particular campaign against the Persians. During one part of the conflict, the Emperor disguised himself "as a peasant selling cabbages" and went with two Armenian nobles

[73] Marcellinus, 184-211.

into the camp of the Persians.[74] Here they "observed, examined, and reckoned the size and strength of its forces", upon which they returned to their own camp.[75] The probability that the Emperor Constantine ever performed such a deed is exceedingly low, but this passage is nevertheless important for two reasons. The initial significance can be found in the fact that Buzund felt it was important to include this story regarding intelligence gathering involving both a Roman leader and his Armenian allies. "Constantine" used this information to make a surprise attack on the Persian camp the next day that resulted in a rout that forced the Persians to give up much of the territory they had gained. This suggests several possibilities. The Romans could have been outnumbered by the Persians so they felt it necessary to rely on unconventional means in order to achieve victory, and the presence of the two Armenian "wise men" hints that these men already possessed a certain degree of proficiency in the tactics that Constantine capitalized on. The other aspect of this passage that is relevant is the fact that Buzund associated a figure as exalted as Constantine with skullduggery. Though the Armenian Church was not always on good terms with the Roman Church, Constantine was still a respected figure to religious authors like Buzund. The fact that he has no hesitation in connecting Constantine to this passage means that disguises and stealth, something often viewed as underhanded tactics in late antiquity, were not seen as inappropriate tactics for commanders to use.

This depiction of Constantine's participation in this kind of intelligence gathering is unique to the Christian Armenian chroniclers, as none of the Christian or non-Christian Roman authors wrote down even remotely similar accounts. Instead, documents such as Eusebius' *Church History* show Constantine in an unsurprisingly religious light.

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[74] ibid., 98.

Eusebius' description of Constantine's various military victories attributes the emperor's successes to the divine intervention of God and not to any sneaking around in enemy camps.[76] Another Christian author from the Roman Empire, Paulus Orosius, describes an incident involving "treachery and guile" used by Marc Antony to capture the Armenian king Artavasdes I in 34 B.C.E.[77] In the account, Antony invited the king to his camp under ostensibly peaceful circumstances, then took him prisoner and forced him to give up Armenian wealth. Antony then used this newfound wealth to begin his rebellion against Augustus, at least according to Orosius. The fact that it is an Armenian king that Antony captures is less significant than the negative tone Orosius gives to the incident. This contrast in what is considered heroic between the Roman Christian chroniclers and their Armenian counterparts can be attributed to several possibilities. First off, it could be anachronism on the part of Buzund. It is possible that tactics like these had become more acceptable in the time in which Buzund wrote (at least a century or more after the end of his account), and he is simply superimposing the standards of his era into his Chronicle. On the other hand, it could be that Armenian society had accepted the use of non-straightforward tactics during this period as a result of necessity created by the polity's military inequity with Rome and Persia. I am advocating for the latter, and my next set of examples from the end of the 4th century will show why.

A telling example of unconventional Armenian tactics comes with the period of Manual Mamikonean towards the end of the fourth century. Manual was the head of one of the most powerful Armenian families who was mentioned in the last section. Manuel

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[75] ibid.

[76] Eusebius, *Church History*, book 9.

[77] Orosius, *The Seven Books of History Against the Pagans,* trans. Roy Deferrari, Catholic Iniversity of America Press, 1964.272.

presents a very interesting figure in this discussion, as he had strong ties to both the Roman empire and to the Sasanids, and yet he ends up defying both of them. As a child, Buzund describes how Manuel was sent to Persia, though no indication is given as to why this was the case.[78] There he grew up and even fought for the Sasanids until he and his brother were sent back to Armenia. Once there, Manuel assumed his position at the head of his noble house after a long power struggle against the Roman puppet king Varazdat. Following Varazdat's elimination, Manuel courted the Persians and even let a Persian governor into Armenia sometime around 370, but then shortly thereafter rebels against the Persians who have become weak following the death of King Shapur II.[79] Considering he is also hostile to the Romans, Manuel must rely on Armenian forces only in order to repel the Persians. In the first battle of this series of engagements, Buzund writes how Manuel attacks the Persian governors camp by surprise and slaughters the entire force except for Suren who he lets go on account of his "loving friendship".[80] Considering the Persians did not even know the Armenians had become hostile at this point, this episode comes off as very similar to the tactics used by the Limingates against Constantius in Valeria. However, unlike Marcellinus who condemned this strategy, Buzund does not treat the attack in a negative manner. In fact, the history treats Manuel as a true Armenian hero.

In response to this sudden betrayal of the Armenians, the Persians begin sending armies in order to reclaim the territory. The first army, led by a figure named Gumand Sapuh, was comprised of 48,000 men and met with Manuel's Armenian force of around

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[78] Garsoian, *The Epic Histories*, 387.
[79] ibid, 388.
[80] Buzund, *The Epic Histories*, 223.

20,000 men somewhere near the Armenian border with northwestern Iran in a region called Atrpayakan.[81] Somehow, the greatly outnumbered Armenians won a "great victory" over the Persians. While it is possible that this account is an exaggeration or outright fallacy, it would not have been impossible for the Armenians to emerge victorious due to the geographic conditions of the region. Like much of Armenia, Atrpayakan is a mountainous region, a fact that the Armenians, who were used to such terrain, could capitalize on. Just as Hannibal discovered when crossing the Alps (or the Persians centuries earlier at Thermopylae), it is exceptionally difficult to bring a large army to bear in treacherous mountain passes. Thus, it is not difficult to imagine Manuel utilizing his smaller, defending force in a way that could have devastated the invading Persians.

Following the loss of this army and a second invasion force, the Persians sent a third army to defeat Manuel and reclaim Armenia. This army, led by Mrkan supposedly contained 400,000 men, though this is obviously doubtful, especially considering that Persia was still in a weak state, something the previous two Armenian victories could not have helped. Still this army apparently had some success, because it is the only one that Buzund describes as having "taken a portion of Armenian land."[82] Regardless of its initial success, this army also met the same fate as the others, and once again Manuel used an unconventional tactic to reach victory. According to Buzund, "Manuel fell on the camp by night and immediately put all those in the fortified camp to the sword. He also killed Mrkan, took much booty, and did not leave a single one of them alive."[83] While the

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[81] ibid, 223.
[82] ibid, 224.
[83] Ibid.

overall veracity of this passage can be called into question due to its adherence to a certain scriptural formula, the fact that Buzund makes no mention of distaste for any of the three different unconventional tactics utilized by Manuel makes it compelling evidence for not only an Armenian acceptance of such tactics, but even an expectation for them. After all, this was a situation when the Armenians were alone against one of the great powers, so it should come as no surprise that this is also a period when these tactics are most apparent.

Another unique example of Armenian use of unconventional tactics described by Buzund comes from the third century. This account is important for three reasons: it is the only example of the heroic figure Vasak using these strategies, it involves the use of non-Armenian native peoples, and it was undertaken in Persian territory. According to Buzund, Vasak rallied non-Armenian peoples known as the Honk and the Alank and aided King Arsak on a night raid against the Persians in their own camp outside of the Armenian border. After destroying most of the Persian army, the combined force proceeded to plunder the surrounding territory.[84] The fact that the Armenians used allies other than the Romans for this attack is In keeping with the theory that they only utilized these unconventional strategies when Roman aid was not available, as was the case here. Also, the fact that Vasak is the leader of this attack on the unsuspecting Persian camp is significant because all of the other descriptions of his military feats are conventional in nature. This tells us once again that there was nothing wrong with such tactics since heroic figures were using them. It also implies that the Armenians had to tread carefully when not in their own territory, since all of Vasak's other supposed victories against the

[84] Ibid., 159.

Persians (which have no mention of sneaky tactics) are on Armenian soil. Thus, this single episode provides us a wealth of information about Armenia's usage of unconventional strategies, and is a fitting case to conclude the lengthy set of Armenian examples.

One of the few Roman accounts from this time period to make mention of the use of sneak attacks and night ambushes by the Romans themselves is once again from Marcellinus. Dodgeon and Lee include an insightful segment from Marcellinus in their primary source collection regarding the actions of a certain commander of Roman forces named Aelianus. According to Marcellinus, sometime around 371 Aelianus led two legions of light infantry into a foray against the Persians at town of Amida, where they killed many Persians "whom they surprised in their sleep."[85] While this account is very similar to those of the Armenian authors, there are some key differences. First of all, Marcellinus is much more descriptive, owing to the fact that he was writing in a time much closer to these events than Buzund, Khorenatsi, and Agathangelos. Another key difference is the fact that what Marcellinus is describing is a relatively small engagement in a much larger war. Nearly all of the night ambushes and other non-conventional encounters described by the Armenian historians are depicted as large battles that were devastating to the Persians or Romans, whichever side happened to be the enemy at that particular time. From this we can ascertain that such tactics were considered essential for victory to Armenian commanders, while Roman generals may have seen them as useful in limited situations. It is this contrast in the degree of importance for unconventional strategies that highlights the uniqueness of the Armenian situation.

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[85] Marcellinus, *Roman History,* in Dodgeon and Lieu, *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars,* 193.

Ultimately the significance of these unconventional tactics relates to the discussion first introduced in Section VI. Because Armenia was unable to compete with its neighbors in the traditional measures of power laid out by Waltz, they were forced to utilize a separate toolset, including the use of night attacks, ambushes, geographical tricks, and intelligence gathering in order to maintain their independence for as long as they did. Though the Armenian sources undoubtedly exaggerate the successes of their leaders, many of whom had achieved folk hero status in the 5th century when most of these accounts were written, the fact that Armenia did manage to avoid being completely annexed by either of its neighbors up until the end of the 4th century leads me to believe that these tactics were successful to some degree. Since none of the authors express any distaste over the use of such tactics, it is likely that Armenia already had a long established tradition of their use by the time these chroniclers wrote. The case involving Constantine is especially noteworthy because it combines these types of tactics with Armenia's other primary tool in its struggle to maintain the balance of power: solicitation. It also highlights key differences between the Roman and Armenian authors, which in turn tells us about the uniqueness of Armenian tactics during this period.

VIII. Armenia, Putting the "Balance" in Balance of Power

In the article "Middlepowers as Extra-Regional Balancer Powers: Canada, India, and Indochina, 1954-62" Douglas Ross discusses how the peacekeeping operations of Canada and India were often viewed as being idealistic in nature.[86] This view developed because it was difficult for some analysts to determine why these governments engaged in these operations when there appeared to only be costs and no benefits to their involvement. Ross goes on to argue that while the Canadian and Indian governments used idealistic rhetoric to justify their varying respective international involvements, each was actually acting as part of the Cold War balance of the power system between the United States and the Soviet Union by serving in a balancer role.

So does this tie in to Armenia, Persia, and Rome during the third and fourth centuries? Well, first of all, it raises a point regarding the differences between the justifications given by polities and the actual motivations behind their actions. Just as the United States does not use oil as a rational for invading Iraq, Canada and India did not use Cold War international power politics as their reasoning for foreign involvements. This applies directly to the Armenian sources, which constantly use religious issues to explain Armenia's foreign policy, and why they were willing to bend the truth or ignore it completely when religion clearly was not at the heart of events.

Ross' article also brings up a larger issue in relation to this topic. While much of this paper has been spent showing how and why Armenia influenced the balance of

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[86] Douglas A. Ross, "Middlepowers as Extra-Regional Balancer Powers: Canada, India, and Indochina, 1954-62", Pacific Affairs, Vol. 55, No. 2. (Summer, 1982), pp. 185-209.

power system between Rome and Persia, it has not yet assessed the degree to which it did so. In his article, Ross does not attempt to establish the actions of Canada and India as being vital to the overall Cold War international world system, he is just pointing out the underlying forces behind those actions tied to the system. In the case of Armenia however, the balancer role played by the polity was absolutely central to the overall system.

I am not saying the Armenia was the root cause of the tensions between Rome and Persia, or that it was the only polity affected by being caught in between the two. This was clearly not the case, as their were other key points of contention between the two, and other peoples influenced by the interaction of the two empires; the work done by Greg Fisher on the political development of the Ghassan is an excellent example of another such group. What I am claiming is that an active Armenia that utilized tools like solicitation was what kept the balance of power system together during the third and fourth centuries. Waltz states that in "the great power politics of bipolar worlds, who is a danger to whom is never in doubt."[87] Obviously Armenia was not a substantial threat to either Rome or Persia on its own, yet it was the main point of contention between the two. As previous sections have shown, this contention was sometimes naturally occurring in both empires, and other times a result of Armenian solicitation. Regardless, each neighbor saw (or could be convinced to see) Armenia as the card that would put their hand over their rival's and acted accordingly. This was primarily due to the fact that Armenia's geographic position made it the natural staging point for an invasion of either Empire, and because Armenia's terrain was such that holding the region was an excellent

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[87] Waltz, 170.

defense against enemy incursions.

If Armenia had behaved in any way other than it did, the relationship between Rome and Persia would have looked much different. For instance, if following its conversion to Christianity Armenia had put itself under the direct control of the Romans, the invasions launched by Shapur II in 336 would have likely been crushed and the campaigns of Julian in 363 would not have ended in the mountains of Armenia but would have rather used the region as a launching point strait into Persian territory. Conversely, if the Persians had maintained strong control over Armenia during the third century the campaigns into Roman territory of Shapur I might have met more success. While these scenarios are obviously deviations from the historical record, they do demonstrate the fact that an independent Armenia was an absolutely vital variable for the events that took place between Rome and Persia during the third and fourth century. This is because Armenia's goal of maintaining its sovereignty led it behave in such a way that also prevented either Rome or Persia from dominating the region and tipping the scales in the balance of power system. It is because of this unique relationship among the agendas of the three polities that Armenia became an absolutely vital balancer state during the third and fourth centuries.

VIII. Conclusions

Ultimately, the purpose of this paper has been to prove three things. The first was that Armenia was an active, unified participant with its own goals caught up in the often-discussed relationship between Rome and Persia. Secondly, that Armenia was able to utilize a unique set of tools different than the standard measures of power described by Kennth Waltz and other international relations theorists in its attempts to maintain its sovereignty. Finally, much of the argument has been concerned with demonstrating that the domestic factors that have figured so prominently within previous scholarship to explain the relationship between Rome and Persia have little explanatory power on their own. Instead, they must be examined utilizing a balance of power perspective to truly understand why each of these polities behaved the way they did. Though this approach is not a common one in regards to ancient history, it has done an excellent job of painting a more complete picture of the complex Roman/Armenian/Persian dynamic that played such an important role in world history during the third and fourth centuries.

Armenia's status as an active player in the Roman and Persian relationship is primarily addressed in the background and "A Country for Old Men" Section. In addition, the secondary literature discussed in the background section shows that Armenia was a critical point of contention between the two ancient superpowers. When this information is combined with the Grosby's insights on the nature of Armenian national identity, it becomes evident that Armenia (or at least Greater Armenia) was indeed a unique and independent polity. The examples regarding the actions of various Armenian kings and important naxrar councils flesh out this first point by showing that Armenia had a strong tradition of political unity that allowed it to act on behalf of its own

interests within the balance of power system in the region. The relative wealth of Armenian chroniclers also demonstrate an element of national identity and pride, even though they are writing at least a century after the actual period in question. Examples from later sections consistently show that Armenia's agenda revolved around maintaining its sovereignty and show that this concern was constantly in the forefront of the naxrars' minds.

Unsurprisingly, this first point ties quite strongly into the idea that Armenia was forced to use a separate set of tools to compete with Rome and Persia, because as a small state it could not match up in the traditional measures. By showing that Armenia was indeed an active player with its own agenda, it naturally follows that the polity must have had a way to influence the system. I argue in the "Armenian, Neighbor" sections that Armenia did indeed have unique ways to advance its own agenda. In the first section, the idea of solicitation, or a small power manipulating a larger power's fears of a rival in order to achieve its own ends, was introduced. The aid that the small state can elicit takes a variety of forms, ranging from extensive military aid to economic help. As this portion lays out, Armenia consistently utilized solicitation in a very effective manner throughout the third and fourth centuries. In every single instance of its implementation, Armenia used solicitation to elicit the support of whichever power was able to stop the other from encroaching on the region's independence. However, solicitation did have its risks, as the numerous examples in this section demonstrated. The tactic presented a very slippery slope that forced the Armenian leadership to constantly alternate which empire it supported. This is due to the fact that as soon as one of the powers helped Armenia in dealing with the other, they often expected Armenia to make concessions. When these

costs came to be too high, the Armenians would then solicit the other power in order to avoid them. Thus, the tool of solicitation encouraged its own reuse during this period.

The second primary small state tool Armenia utilized was unconventional military tactics. The fact that so many examples in this paper revolve around military encounters is a testament to the fact that military engagement was a critical part of the system. With its small population size, Armenia could not field the class of armies that Persia and Rome often put into the field. Thus, it is unsurprising that Armenia often tried to solicit its neighbors for troops, but on those occasions when this diplomatic strategy failed Greater Armenia was forced to find another tool to avoid being trampled. This tool came in the form of various unconventional tactics, including: ambushes, night raids, intelligence gathering, and clever use of geography. Though none of these tactics were unheard of for other polities in the ancient world, the extent to which the Armenians used them and the tone used to describe them in the localized ancient sources reveals their significance. As is made evident within the section, other contemporary authors saw the use of such tactics in a very negative light, in contrast to the Armenian authors who glorified it to some extent. This difference in tone suggests a tradition of such strategies in Armenia, an idea that matches with the realities of being a critically located small state in the balance of power system.

The final primary purpose of this paper was essentially to complicate the field's current scholarly conceptions about the role of the various domestic transformations within each involved polity during this period by viewing events from an international political systems perspective. As is made evident in the background, historical convention has been to attribute major changes in the behavior of each polity towards the

others to these transitions. Thus, traditional histiography has advanced the idea that Rome and Greater Armenia became staunch allies following the conversion to Christianity of each, and Persia supposedly became diametrically opposed to Armenian because of its religious identity change in 301. However, as is shown in example after example throughout this thesis, Rome and Armenia still came into conflict even after they adopted the same faith, and Persia and Armenia still were allies at some points following its conversion. Similarly, Armenia allied with Rome against Persia at times during the first half of the third century despite many cultural and ethnic ties to its eastern neighbor. In order to understand these seemingly difficult to comprehend decisions, we must simply step back and observe them from an international perspective; when this has been done, a clear pattern emerges: Armenia supported whatever power would help it maintain its sovereignty. It was this concern, rather than other domestic or identity issues, that explains the events of the third and fourth centuries.

This is not to say that the emergence of the Sassanids in Persia, Rome's transition from the Principate to the Dominate, and Armenia's conversion to Christianity were completely irrelevant events. Each did indeed play a role in the relationship, but instead of being straightforward causes of behavioral changes, these transitions are part of a complex interdependent relationship between domestic structures and international pressures. While there s not nearly enough evidence to say that Armenia converted to Christianity for diplomatic purposes, there were clearly international pressures at play. On the same line of thinking, Rome's inability to hold Armenia and gain an edge over Persia led to serious border problems, which was international pressure involved in Diocletian's sweeping reforms that resulted in the Dominate. Even the end of Parthian

rule in Persia and the rise of the Sassanids can be partially attributed to blows dealt against the Parthians by Trajan, though little evidence survives from Persia during this period so it is impossible to make a stronger assertion than that.

After all is said and done, it is my hope that this thesis has served to shed light on the importance of the role played by Armenia in the Roman-Persian relationship. Even more ambitious than that, I hope that my integration of international relations theory has shown that small state actors, even in the ancient world, can be much more than simple strategic pawns in the agendas of the great powers. It is often all too easy to forget that these small powers have goals of their own within the world system, and it is even easier to ignore the tools and strategies that they use to advance those goals. Not only did Armenia influence the behavior of its larger neighbors, it did so successfully in a manner that allowed it to maintain a relatively high degree of independence in the face of nearly overwhelming odds. I am sure that there are numerous other historical examples, from all eras, in which the role of smaller actors is overshadowed by their larger counterparts, and if this thesis has shown anything, it is that this trend is one that the academic community should do its utmost end. Until we begin to strive to do so, there will remain countless examples similar to Armenia of the third and fourth centuries, places, people, and ideas ignored not because of any lack of significance, but rather because they have yet to be given the attention required to unravel their true importance.

Appendix I. Literature Review

Like the primary sources, the secondary works addressing this topic usually do so from the perspective of one of the three involved polities. This provides a general framework with which to divide them up, but within each of these basic categories there are a wide variety of issues being examined. Most of the variety is related to the differences in subject area, as some books can be considered general history books while others focus on specific elements of each polity such as economics, politics, and foreign policy. The general history books provided much of the background information laid forth in Section II, while the more focused works were useful in actually putting together a picture of how Armenia affected Roman and Persian foreign relations.

The number of modern sources for Armenian history is small compared to those that can be found for Rome and Persia. Adding to this problem, most of them cover the early medieval period, centuries after the timeframe in question for this paper. Still, there is solid secondary literature to be found, and though there numbers have been few, dedicated scholars like Nina Garsoain and Robert Thomson contributed much to the field during the 1970s and 80s. In terms of recent works, Geoerge Bournoutian's *A Concise History of the Armenian People* represents a good background history book which features chapters on Armenia under Roman and Persian rule, but its large timeframe (ancient-present) makes these sections a little too brief. There are some other good general history books available, but other than the work of Garsoian, Thomson, and Edward Dabrowa there is little work that has been done in areas similar ot my topic.

Just as with the primary sources, Rome has been blessed in the amount of secondary work done in the field compared to Persia and Armenia. On the more specific

end of things, two books stand out as especially useful: Gary Young's *Rome's Eastern Trade: International Commerce and Imperial Policy, 31 BC-AD 305* and R.C. Blockley's *East Roman Foreign Policy: Formation and Conduct from Diocletian to Anastatius.* Young's work is relevant as its discussion of Rome's eastern trade includes evidence as to Armenia's role in Roman commerce, an important aspect of peacetime relations among between the polities. Blockley is especially useful not only for his in-depth analysis of the shift that occurred in Roman foreign policy beginning in the 4th century but also for his incorporation of international relations theory. Being able to reference how a previous author merged standard historical analysis with IR theory has been an invaluable asset to me throughout the course of developing this thesis. The common flaw of both of these authors is their treatment of Armenia; each discusses the region mostly as something that was acted upon by its neighbors, ignoring the active role that Armenia played in the Roman-Persian balance of power. Another book which deals with a more technical aspect of the topic ss Andrew Gillett's *Envoys and Poltical Communication in the Late Antique West, 411-533.* Though the time period covered is somewhat later than the one under discussion in these pages, Gillet's book still provides excellent insights into the nature of diplomatic relations in the general time period.

Fortunately the state of modern histiography for ancient Persia does not reflect the dearth of primary evidence available for the empire. An excellent entry point into studying the whole of Persian history is the concise book *The Persians* by Maria Brosius. Brosius does an excellent job of providing background information on all three primary periods of the Empire, including the two that are relevant here, the Parthians and Sassanians. An older but more extensive general history is Richard Frye's *The History of*

Ancient Iran which is still an excellent work despite being written in 1984. Fyre gets into more detail than Brosius, and one look at book's index reveals that Fyre pays a good deal of attention to Armenia. For detailed information on more specific aspects of the Persian empire Edward Dabrowa's essay collection *Ancient Iran and its Neighbors* has some uses, though the topics were so specific that their value was limited for application to other areas. There are fewer books that deal with specifically with the foreign policy of Persia during the 3rd and 4th century than there are for the Roman side of things, but this is made up for by the presence of excellent general history books on the Persian Empire that pay a great deal of attention to these issues and even to Armenia.

There are some secondary sources that do not fit neatly into the Roman/Persian/Armenian dichotomy used above due to the fact that they address the perspectives of more than one actor. The two most notable examples of such works featured in this essay are another collection of essays compiled by Dabrowa entitled *The Roman Near East and Armenia* and Nina Garsoian's *Armenia Between Byzantium and the Sasaniand.* These two works are among the very few that use a similar perspective on Armenian history to the cross border lens being used in these pages, though neither deals specifically with Armenia's role in the foreign affairs of the great powers or the impact that role may have had on political transformations. Garsoian can be considered the premier Antiquity historian of Armenia, and her book (which is actually a compilation of papers she has written for various publications) is still the preeminent secondary source dealing with issues crossing the borders of Armenia, Persia, and Rome. Dabrowa's collection is useful for the same reasons, though most of the essays contained within are religious or cultural in nature, making them a little less applicable to issues of politics and

international relations. Also, an unfortunate side note to each of these works is the fact that they contain some essays in languages other than English, thus putting some information beyond my grasp.

Though the books detailed in the last category, as well as some of the Roman foreign policy works like that of Blockley deal with similar issues to those being explored here, there is still a large gap present in our knowledge of how small powers like Armenia dealt with the Roman and Persian empires. To treat them merely as territories that were handed back and forth by larger polities thru diplomacy and military conflict has been a hallmark of much of the research done to this point, despite evidence that is contrary to this notion.

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