

## Preface

*Orbis Terrarum* is the publication of the Ernst Kirsten Society and a forum for research in the field of Historical Geography of Antiquity. It provides an academic platform for studies by historians, geographers, philologists, and archaeologists, as well as other scholars of antiquity concerned with aspects of historical geography. The spectrum is deliberately broad: Studies on the geographic-topographic profile of the ancient world find a place here, as well as research on the historical interaction between humans and landscape and works on methodology or the history of science. Each volume also includes reviews of selected recent books within the field. *Orbis Terrarum* publishes articles in English, French, German, Italian, and Spanish.

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## AUFsätze

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**Pride, Prejudice, and Nostalgia**

Strabo's View of Pontus

**ABSTRACT:** The fact that Strabo was born in Amasia, the former capital of Pontus, lends a distinctive character to his description of this kingdom and its ancient dynasty. He seeks to extol the virtues of the country, integrating it as far as possible into the Greek tradition, while softening the harsh image of its inhabitants attested in several sources. Thus, he aspires to be regarded as a member of the Hellenic community, despite the barbarian branches of his lineage. Strabo emphasises that his ancestors held important positions under the Pontic kings, and in particular under Mithridates Eupator. This pride stands in tension with his desire to present himself as a loyal subject of Rome, whose peaceful rule is portrayed as having brought prosperity to the region. He looks back with a degree of nostalgia on the glorious period of the Mithridatids, yet criticises them for having subjugated Greeks and for the calamities which Eupator's wars with Rome brought to his homeland and his own family.

**KEYWORDS:** Strabo, Pontus, Cappadocia, Mithridatids, Mithridates Eupator

**1. Introduction**

Writing about Strabo's perspective on his native land proves challenging. Indeed, much has been argued on a matter that, seemingly, concerns only a small part of a work as vast as the *Geography*, which, beyond its immediate purpose, raises a series of fundamental questions about the author from Amasia. It is difficult to add anything new to what numerous scholars—undoubtedly more specialised in Strabo's work than I am—have already written.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, in this paper, I shall primarily aim to offer my own reflections, which began back in 1987 when I started my doctoral thesis on Mithridates Eupator, the king of Pontus. The unfortunate loss of Strabo's *Historical Commentaries* forces us to rely solely on the *Geography* for any research concerning him. At first glance, this work appears somewhat neutral, making it often difficult to discern the author's ideas, which

<sup>1</sup> This paper has been drawn up within the Research Project, “Los dioses de Anatolia y sus nombres en textos griegos de época helenística y romana” (PID2021-124635NB-C32), sponsored by the Ministry of Economy of Spain and the European Union. In general, on Strabo, see Dueck 2000; Dueck/Lindsay/Pothecary 2005; Dueck 2017b. On Strabo and Pontus, see in particular Syme 1995, 289–385; Ballesteros Pastor 1998; Gnoli 2000; Lindsay 2005; Bowersock 2000; Olshausen 2014, 40–4; Kuin 2017, 105–7; Panichi 2019; Paganoni 2024. A comprehensive commentary on Strabo's description of Pontus appears particularly in Olshausen/Biller 1984; see further Radt 2008, 359–405; Roller 2018, 698–718.

are at times expressed only indirectly.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless, I believe that the *Geography*, apart from its connection with the worldview promoted by Augustus and its praise of the *Pax Romana*, harbours an underlying intention: to elevate the author himself and to present an image of him aligned with his personal interests.

## 2. Pontus, a remote barbarian land

Let us begin with Strabo's native land. The Kingdom of Pontus straddled Eastern Paphlagonia and the so-called Pontic Cappadocia, which is also referred to in the sources as Syria, Upper Cappadocia, or, at least in part, Lesser Armenia.<sup>3</sup> We are thus in the vicinity of what for a long time was considered the eastern boundary of the *oikoumene* in the Greek view: this was the land visited by the Argonauts shortly before reaching their destination, and also a country located near the underworld. Pontus lay between the settings of two of Heracles' Labours: the abduction of Cerberus, according to certain traditions in Heraclea Pontica, and the theft of Hyppolyte's girdle, supposedly in Themiscyra, a village situated east of Amisus, to which *chora* it belonged.<sup>4</sup> This was the fantastical realm of the Amazons, who lived alongside peoples regarded as savage, such as the Chalybes, the Mossynoeci, and the Tibareni.<sup>5</sup>

As we have said, the kingdom of the Mithridatids encompassed Eastern Paphlagonia and Pontic Cappadocia, on both sides of the mouth of the Halys. Even though, in Strabo's time, the inhabitants along both banks of this river shared similar features, Marta Sordi argued that the Halys had long constituted a cultural as well as a physical boundary. It had once marked the divide between barbarism and civilisation—between the flourishing kingdom of Croesus and the Persian world that would eventually defeat this renowned ruler.<sup>6</sup> The image of remoteness and isolation associated with the lands surrounding the lower course of the Halys appears to have been transmitted through the centuries. Indeed, Alexander had reminded the Sinopeans that they did not belong to

2 On the *Historikà Hypomnēmata*, see above all ENGELS 1999, 76–113; ENGELS 2013; LINDSAY 2014; MALINOWSKI 2017. On the combination of Geography and History in Strabo's work, see OLSHAUSEN 2022, 140.

3 BALLESTEROS PASTOR 2013, 149–150; BALLESTEROS PASTOR 2016b, 273–5. On the boundaries of Mithridatid Pontus, see above all Strab. 12.3.1; 12.3.16; 12.3.18; cf. 12.3.28; LASSERRE 1981, 159 n.10; OLSHAUSEN 2014; OLSHAUSEN 2022, 138. It has been inferred from Strabo (12.3.1–2; cf. 6) that Heraclea Pontica was *de facto* incorporated by Eupator: NIESE 1883, 578; OLSHAUSEN 2022, 138; and for discussion MAREK 1993, 35–6; GNOLI 2000, 545–50; PAGANONI 2024, 124 with n. 37. In fact, Strabo begins his description of the Pontic kingdom from Amastris (12.3.9–10). He refers to the territories east of Side, at the easternmost point of the *chora* of Amisus, as “Lesser Armenia” (12.3.18, cf. 28–29, 37). However, as he states in 12.3.28, Mithridates expanded his realm as far as Trapezus, reaching the border with Colchis, which was likewise annexed: see OLSHAUSEN/BILLER 1984, 3–4.

4 For sources about these Labours, see GANTZ 1993, 397–400, 413–6. Allegedly, Sinope had been founded by Autolykus, one of the Argonauts: BALLESTEROS PASTOR 2026b (with further bibliography). Remarkably, Strabo records this tradition (12.3.11). On Pontus and the Underworld, see further BALLESTEROS PASTOR 2026b.

5 On these peoples, see MANOLEDAKIS 2017, 156–65; MANOLEDAKIS 2022, 154–218.

6 SORDI 1982. On these common features, see Strab. 12.3.25, 12.3.40.

the Hellenic confederation.<sup>7</sup> All the more so, when we speak of Amasia, Strabo's birthplace, located beyond that river, we find ourselves unmistakably in a barbarian environment. Moreover, this was the former capital of Pontus, where the tombs of the ancient Mithridatid kings were still clearly visible. By the time of our author, these monarchs had almost become legendary characters, representing a distant past quite different from the firmly established Roman authority that now ruled the region.<sup>8</sup>

As Strabo himself states, largely following Aristotle's view, those who live in cities, that is, in *poleis*, are civilised.<sup>9</sup> In this regard, we must bear in mind that Mithridatid Pontus was not a land of cities, and even after Eupator's efforts to give a civic appearance to certain indigenous settlements, and the subsequent Pompeian organisation of part of the country into civic districts, a predominantly village-like context still prevailed in the region. This, to a great extent, explains why Rome did not initially annex all the Anatolian territories formerly ruled by the Mithridatids.<sup>10</sup>

### 3. Pontus and Strabo's "patriotic" pride

Just as with other barbarians, such as the Carians—whom Strabo mentions when discussing the origin of this term—the Cappadocians and Paphlagonians were regarded as rough people, a view generally extended to all the inhabitants of the Black Sea region. The Paphlagonians were at times portrayed as a simple folk, with coarse habits.<sup>11</sup> As for Cappadocia, Diodorus asserts that this land had long been ignored by the Greeks. Lucan does not hesitate to describe the Cappadocians as "ferce", taking into account that *feritas* was considered a barbarian trait.<sup>12</sup> Thus, calling someone "Cappadocian" carried a certain pejorative connotation. For this reason, on the few instances when the sources refer to Mithridates Eupator as "Cappadocian", it is always with the intention of disparaging him: such is the case with the Ephesian decree on debts, in which the city retracts its earlier support for the king, and Posidonius' passage about the arrival of the pro-Pon-

7 *Arr. an.* 3.24.4; cf. *Curt.* 6.5.6; BOSWORTH 1980, 353–4; ATKINSON 1994, 133–4; BRIANT 1996, 719.

8 On Amasia as Strabo's birthplace, see *Strab.* 12.3.15, 38, 39. In general, on the city, see LINDSAY 2005, 180–99; and further OLSHAUSEN/BILLER 1980, 105; MAREK 1993, 19; SYME 1995, 295–301. On the royal tombs, see FLEISCHER 2017; BALLESTEROS PASTOR 2021, 191–2.

9 *Strab.* 3.4.13; cf. *Arist. Pol.* 1.1.1253; THOLLARD 1987, 10. On Strabo and Aristotle, see in general ROSEMAN 2005.

10 For discussion, see SAPRYKIN 1992; GNOLI 2000, 561; BALLESTEROS PASTOR 2006, 386–91; SØRENSEN 2017, 107–12; COŞKUN 2021b.

11 On the Paphlagonians and Cappadocians, see in general Aristophanes, *Knights*, and also Petron. 68–69; *Curt.* 6.11.4; *Lucian Alex.* 9, 17, 39; *Lib. or.* 1.85; MITCHELL 2010, 87–93; MANOLEDAKIS 2021; MANOLEDAKIS 2022, 126–9 (with further references), and below n. 21. Paphlagonia had traditionally been a country that supplied slaves: ATKINSON 1994, 238; MANOLEDAKIS 2022, 122. In general, the people of the Black Sea region were reputed as rough and ignorant: *Hdt.* 4.46.1; MITCHELL 2002, 40; HARLAND 2021, 83–7. On the Carians, see ALMAGOR 2005, 44–8; PONTANI 2023.

12 See *Luc.* 3.43–44; *Diod.* 31.19.8, respectively. On *feritas* as a barbarian attribute, see DAUGE 1981, 428–9; BALLESTEROS PASTOR 2013, 235 (with further bibliography). On this concept in Strabo, see THOLLARD 1987, 11, 38–9; CORDE 2005, 83–5.

tic tyrant Athenion in Athens, where the Athenians who sided with Mithridates are also disdainfully called “Cecropids”.<sup>13</sup> The same contemptuous sense of the term “Cappadocian” would be taken up by Mommsen centuries later.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, the passage, where Strabo speaks of the assistance to Rome against Aristonicus by “the kings of the Cappadocians”, in reference to both Ariarathes V and Mithridates Euergetes, we believe to be a slip by our author not repeated elsewhere in his work, as he consistently distinguishes between the kings of Pontus and those of Cappadocia.<sup>15</sup> In this final phase of Hellenism, kings were officially associated with a specific territory over which they exercised authority, as can be inferred from the *Lex de Prouinciis praetoriis*.<sup>16</sup>

Flavius Josephus repeatedly refers to Strabo as “the Cappadocian”, possibly reflecting a well-established tradition in the Jewish author’s time.<sup>17</sup> However, this label may not have been to Strabo’s liking, as he sought above all to be considered a worthy member of the Hellenic community, despite having barbarian blood in his ancestry. Indeed, Strabo always refers to the Cappadocians in the third person, never calls Pontus as “my homeland”, and instead refers to Amasia as “my city” or “my fatherland”, and to its *chora* as “my country”.<sup>18</sup> In any case, no passage in the *Geography* echoes the negative stereotype of the peoples of Cappadocia and Paphlagonia.

Indeed, I believe that Strabo was interested—perhaps even obsessed—with being considered, above all, as a Greek.<sup>19</sup> If we examine more closely the aforementioned passage from Book XIV of the *Geography* about the Carians, it seems to serve as a defense of the author, who, although he does not consider himself a barbarophone, seeks to make it clear that those peoples who do not pronounce Greek correctly are not hindered because of any

13 See respectively: *Syll.*<sup>3</sup> 742; Poseid. *BNJ* 87 F 36; Athen. 5.212a, cf. 215b. For further sources referring to the Mithridatic kings or their subjects as “Cappadocians”, see BALLESTEROS PASTOR 2013, 148. The Pontic commander Archelaus, who possibly came from Sophene (BALLESTEROS PASTOR 2026a), is called ‘Cappadocian’ by Sulla, perhaps in a derogatory sense (Plut. *Sulla* 22.4, 23.2). The term “Cecropids” recorded in Posidonius’ fragment (*apud* Athen. 212b) would have aimed to ridicule the glorious past claimed by the Athenians (FERRARY 1989, 833; BALLESTEROS PASTOR 2005, 390).

14 MOMMSEN 1889, 268. See BALLESTEROS PASTOR 1996, 304–7, for discussion.

15 Strab. 14.1.38. There are compelling reasons to hold this view: 1. Nowhere else in the *Geography* are the Mithridatids referred to as “Kings of Cappadocia” or “of the Cappadocians”, but simply as “Kings” (implicitly of Pontus: 12.3.9, 31, 34, 38, 40, 41, cf. 6.4.2). 2. Strabo clearly states that the kingdom of the Mithridatids, called Pontus, was composed of lands and peoples belonging to Paphlagonia and Pontic Cappadocia, divided by the Halys (see, respectively, 12.3.41 and 12.3.38). This kingdom must therefore be distinguished from the territory that Strabo calls Greater Cappadocia, Tauric Cappadocia, or simply Cappadocia Proper (12.1.4; 12.2.11; 12.3.12, 13, 32, 39). 3. Strabo differentiates the Ariarathids of Cappadocia (12.1.2; 12.2.1; 13.4.2) from the Mithridatids of Pontus, omitting any reference to the kinship between them attested in other sources (App. *Mithr.* 10, 12; Just. *Epit.* 38.2.5; cf. 38.7.2; see BALLESTEROS PASTOR 2013, 150–1). Similarly, the Ariobarzanids and Archelaus I are consistently referred to as “Kings of Cappadocia” or “Kings of the Cappadocians” (Strab. 12.1.2, 4; 12.2.1, 8–11; 12.3.29; 14.5.6; cf. 14.2.29). Regardless, Strabo occasionally conflates ethnic Cappadocia with political Cappadocia: PAGANONI 2024, 118–9.

16 MUCCIOLI 2013, 37. For the inscription, see CRAWFORD et alii 1996, 240, 249 (Delphi B ll. 8–9). As SYME pointed out (SYME 1995, 293), Strabo shows some surprising inaccuracies concerning Pontus. See above n. 15.

17 Joseph. *AJ* 13.284; 14.34, 104, 111, 114, 137; 15.8; RICHARDS 1941, 79; DUECK 2000, 3.

18 See Strab. 12.3.6, 15, 38. In 12.3.39, Strabo does not specify that he is referring to the region of Amasia, although such an interpretation may be inferred by analogy with 12.3.38.

19 See DUECK 2000, 2, 83; TRAINA 2022, 516.

intellectual or physical deficiency, but rather by the particularities of their respective native languages.<sup>20</sup> In this regard, it is worth recalling that the Paphlagonians, and, above all, the Cappadocians, had a distinctive accent and manner of speaking that provoked a certain perplexity in other parts of the Roman Empire.<sup>21</sup> Likewise, Strabo was aware of his Persian, and possibly also Anatolian, family roots, alongside his Greek lineage. However, if not for the isolated mentions of his maternal great-uncle Moaphernes, the Iranian branch of our author's family would have remained unrecognised, and we might have believed him to be just another descendant of the Greeks who ventured to colonise the Black Sea—an ancestry to which we should also add the Cretan branch of his genealogy.<sup>22</sup>

In this same sense, we can bring to light various aspects of Strabo's description of the Kingdom of Pontus, and thus observe how, in many cases, he attempts to Hellenise these elements, or at least to make them acceptable to a reader familiar with Greek culture. Undoubtedly, one of the most well-known passages from Book XII of the *Geography*, in which our author depicts his native land, is the lengthy digression on whether or not Homer mentioned peoples living east of the Halys. Strabo's fervent defense of the connection between the inhabitants of his homeland and the Homeric past is undoubtedly driven by a deliberate intention to associate himself with that tradition.<sup>23</sup> Just as Sinope preserved a copy of the *Iliad*, which represented a prestigious marker of the city's membership in the Hellenic community, being born in a land involved in the epic struggle between Achaeans and Trojans meant not being a rustic barbarian, but rather possessing roots worthy of consideration from a spiritual and historical perspective. This was particularly relevant in a cultural environment where Rome sought to position itself as a new Athens, and where Greek scholars and artists constituted one of the essential pillars of intellectual life in the *Urbs*.<sup>24</sup> Strabo also does not forget that Themiscyra was the legendary homeland of the Amazons, another motif drawn from mythic tradition.<sup>25</sup> Likewise the author's emphasis on the Eneti – supposedly of the same stock as those from Paphlagonia – as among the first Italic peoples to be regarded as Romans, seems

20 Strab. 14.2.28; ALMAGOR 2005, 44–8; TRACHSEL 2017, 270.

21 *Anth. Pal.* 11.436; Philostr. *soph.* 2.13; Greg. Naz. *or.* 43.27; Basil. *Spir. S.* 12.4.6 (PG 32.208). On the Paphlagonians, see above n. 11. By contrast, Strabo (12.4.6) states that in his time the inhabitants of north-western Anatolia had already lost their ancestral accents. He delimits Cappadocia by the language spoken by its inhabitants: 12.1.1; PAGANONI 2024, 116–7.

22 On Moaphernes: Strab. 11.2.18; 12.3.33; PORTANOVA 1988, 349–50. On Strabo's family, see further PORTANOVA 1988, 244–50, 402–403; CASSIA 2000; DUECK 2000, 5–8; KUIN 2017; BIFFI 2020, 211–3. Tibius and Theophilus, Strabo's relatives (12.3.33), have been considered Paphlagonians: see CASSIA 2000, 228; and especially GABELKO 2013, 117–27, who also notes that the name Sterope, the mother of Dorylaeus' children, is not Greek. The name of Philetaerus, brother of Dorylaeus the Tactician, may have been of Cappadocian origin: CASSIA 2000, 229–30.

23 Strab. 12.3.19–27; MANOLEDAKIS 2013, 25–7; MANOLEDAKIS 2021, 171; TRACHSEL 2017, 266, 269–70. See further, among others, CAMASSA 1984; RADT 2008, 371–85; MITCHELL 2010, 93–7; cf. OLSHAUSEN 2022, 138.

24 On the copy of the *Iliad* in Sinope, see HASLAM 1997, 70. On Augustan Rome as the revival of Classical Athens, see e.g. HIDBER 1996, 75–81.

25 Strab. 12.3.9, 14. On this site, see BALLESTEROS PASTOR 2009.

far from accidental: indeed, he claims that those Eneti who did not march towards Italy with the Trojan Antenor had become Cappadocians.<sup>26</sup>

Similarly, Strabo attempts to “Hellenise” certain barbarian aspects of his country. It is particularly telling that, when referring to sacred prostitution in the sanctuary of Comana Pontica, he compares it to Corinth. Clearly, through this analogy—which does not appear in any other ancient author—Strabo intended to frame this practice not as a mark of barbarism, but as something entirely acceptable from the perspective of the Hellenic community.<sup>27</sup> In a similar vein, the ritual of the Sacaea celebrated in Zela, of Persian origin, is described in the *Geography* as “a kind of Bacchic festival”.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, the author from Amasia endeavours to adapt certain Persian terms into Greek terminology. Such is the case with \**Khvarenah*, a concept that refers to the glory and splendour of Persian kings, exalting their legitimacy over false claimants. Following a long-standing tradition, Strabo translates this term as *tyche*, which is somewhat misleading, as anyone unfamiliar with the Iranian world might interpret it only partially. Thus, when Strabo describes the oath of the Pontic kings “by the fortune of the king and the Men of Pharnaces” (as the phrase is commonly translated), he is in fact alluding to this Iranian-rooted notion.<sup>29</sup> Notably, Men Pharnacou was in fact a designation for Zeus Stratios, which suggests that we are dealing with the adaptation of the name of an Anatolian deity.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, it is striking that no further references to Men have been preserved east of the Halys, with the sole exception of one from Comana in Cappadocia.<sup>31</sup>

#### 4. Silences regarding Pontus

Just as with his own family, Strabo’s silences regarding Pontus are noteworthy.<sup>32</sup> In my view, he deliberately omits—or at times reinterprets—many of the Iranian elements of Mithridatid Pontus. Some of these omissions may stem from the sources he relied on, from a desire to avoid repeating what had already been said in the *Histories*, or perhaps simply from another circumstance.<sup>33</sup> However, the lack of references to certain aspects of ancient Pontus may also reflect a conscious effort to convey a particular image of the country and its people. Strabo claims emphatically having witnessed the Zoroastrian Magi of Cappadocia, while he mentions nothing of those of Pontus, where Magi who would undoubtedly have been instructors of the young Eupator and other nobles of the

26 Strab. 5.1.1, 4, 9; 12.3.8, 25; MANOLEDAKIS 2021, 172.

27 Strab. 12.3.36; BALLESTEROS PASTOR 2017, 49, with further bibliography.

28 Strab. 11.8.5; MITCHELL 2002, 57; SERGUEENKOVA/ROJAS 2017, 278–80; QADERI 2018, 176, 178.

29 Strab. 12.3.31; MELIKIAN-CHIRVANI 1993, 27–8; GNOLI 1999; BALLESTEROS PASTOR 2025, 470–2. On \**Khvarenah*, see, in general, DE JONG 1998; SOUDAVAR 2003, 88–101; BATTESTI 2011. On Men Pharnacou, see further OLSHAUSEN 1990, 1887–9.

30 BALLESTEROS PASTOR 2025, 467–9 (with further bibliography).

31 LANE 1975, no. A6; LANE 1976, 41; BALLESTEROS PASTOR 2025, 465.

32 CLARKE 1997, 99: “We cannot do more than speculate on what Strabo chose *not* to tell us”. In general, on this issue, see POTHECARY 2002.

33 On Strabo’s inaccuracies concerning Pontus, see above n. 16.

realm were present.<sup>34</sup> The king's tiara is never mentioned, nor are sacrifices to Mithra, or other Zoroastrian deities and rituals that must have been practised in the country.<sup>35</sup> Despite being born in Amasia, Strabo does not mention Mithridates' sacrifices to Zeus Stratius, which bore certain similarities with those of the Persian kings and were celebrated, among other places, in the vicinity of that city. By contrast, Appian refers to them in two passages, and were it not for his testimony, they might have gone unnoticed, as the preserved remains of the *temenos* of this god and the coins depicting its altar date from the Roman imperial period.<sup>36</sup>

There are other notable omissions in this section of the *Geography*: Strabo rarely mentions Pharnaces II, the son of Mithridates, and he does not refer at all to Dynamis, the daughter of the former, who successively married three Bosporan rulers: Asander, Scribonius, and Polemon, whose reigns are jointly mentioned by Strabo.<sup>37</sup> This influential woman is said to have had close ties with the family of Augustus, making her absence from the *Geography* particularly striking.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, Strabo appears to consider the Mithridatid dynasty as having been extinguished following Eupator's death, thus excluding his descendants. In addition to his rule over Bosporus, Pharnaces II reigned over Anatolian Pontus for barely a year (48/47 BC).<sup>39</sup> Moreover, Pharnaces' sons later governed certain districts of this territory.<sup>40</sup> Meanwhile, Aspurgus, Dynamis' son, continued to rule in the Bosporus, an area considered part of the ancestral domains of the Mithridatids.<sup>41</sup> Some time later, Mithridates VIII (or III of the Bosporus) proudly proclaimed his descent from Cyrus the Great, undoubtedly due to his lineage from Mithridates Eupator.<sup>42</sup>

Several explanations –among others– could be presumed for this silence regarding Dynamis: Strabo's possible animosity towards this queen or one of her three husbands; the rather remote possibility that he merely reproduced sources, such as Polybius or

34 On Strabo and the Cappadocian Magi, see Strab. 15.3.15; DE JONG 2012, 121–56. On Magi at the Pontic court, see BALLESTEROS PASTOR 2020, 4–6.

35 On Mithridates' tiara, see Plut. *Pomp* 33.3. The followers of Pharnaces II, Eupator's son, placed a papyrus sheaf on his head, as if it were a tiara: App. *Mithr.* 111; BALLESTEROS PASTOR 2021, 185–6. Remains of a Zoroastrian sanctuary and a fire temple were discovered 25 km southeast of Amasia: DÖNMEZ 2019.

36 App. *Mithr.* 66; cf. 70; BALLESTEROS PASTOR 2003; CANEPA 2017, 218–9; WILLIAMSON 2014; MCGING 2014, 33. On the *temenos*, see in particular FRENCH 1996.

37 Strab. 11.2.11. See further Cass. Dio 54.24.3–4; Lucian. *Macr.* 17 (Asander and Scribonius); Cass. Dio 54.24.4–6 (Polemo I). On these familiar relations, see COJOCARU 2015. Pharnaces II is mentioned by Strabo on only six occasions: 11.2.11; 11.2.17; 11.5.8; 12.3.14; 12.3.38; 13.4.3.

38 On Dynamis and Augustus' family, see above all COŞKUN/STERN 2021.

39 Strab. 6.4.2. On the rule of Pharnaces II in Pontus, probably from August 48 to August 47 BC, see COŞKUN 2019; COŞKUN 2021c, 3–5; COŞKUN 2021d, 308–13; BALLESTEROS PASTOR 2021.

40 After the battle of Philippi (42 BC), Darius, Pharnaces' son, ruled over part of Pontus for a brief time: App. *civ.* 5.75.1; OLSHAUSEN 1980, 909–10; SULLIVAN 1990, 160–1; MADSEN 2020, 88; BALLESTEROS PASTOR 2021, 122. Arsakes, his brother, was appointed to govern there a few years later: Strab. 12.3.38; cf. 12.3.39; MAREK 1993, 50; SYME 1995, 172; BALLESTEROS PASTOR 2023b, 110.

41 On Bosporus as the ancestral domain of the Mithridatids: Just. *Epit.* 37.1.7; cf. Plut. *Sull.* 11.2; App. *Mithr.* 15, 58, 112; cf. 107, 113; BALLESTEROS PASTOR 2013, 120–3; BALLESTEROS PASTOR 2023c, 461; cf. Strab. 11.2.13. On Aspurgus, see COŞKUN/STERN 2021.

42 Tac. *ann.* 12.18.12; BALLESTEROS PASTOR 2011. This descent is confirmed by Cassius Dio 60.8.2; cf. *contra* COŞKUN 2021c, 3–4 (with bibliography).

Theophanes, in which she was not mentioned; or that Pythodoris, likely a protectress of the Amasian author, could have harboured some kind of rivalry towards Dynamis, the former wife of her husband, Polemon – although there is no evidence for this.<sup>43</sup> Likewise, Strabo does not mention Agrippa's campaign in the Black Sea, which must have been significant in the pacification and administration of the entire area – notably, Phanagoreia, the capital of the Bosporean kingdom, changed its name to Agrippeia.<sup>44</sup> Lastly, it is difficult to determine whether this silence on Dynamis has any connection with the fact that Strabo refers to the Bosporean rulers after Mithridates merely as *dynastai*, although shortly afterwards he calls them *basileis*.<sup>45</sup> Except for Scribonius, there is evidence that all the sovereigns of Bosporus during this period bore the royal title, and even “King of Kings” or “Great King of Kings”.<sup>46</sup> In this regard, it is worth recalling that Dynamis was recognised as *basilissa*.<sup>47</sup>

## 5. Nostalgia: Strabo and the kings of Pontus

All these reflections lead us to another crucial question: Strabo's attitude towards the Mithridatid dynasty in general, and Mithridates Eupator in particular. Just as we saw regarding the Pontic land, Strabo has conflicting feelings on this aspect. It was undeniable that Mithridates had been an important ruler, who had defied Rome for several decades and significantly influenced the politics of the *Urbs*. By the time Strabo was writing, this king must have already become a legendary, prestigious, and admired figure.<sup>48</sup> To some degree, we can say he was viewed in a manner similar to Hannibal, whom the Romans

43 On Dynamis' marriages, see above n. 37. OLSHAUSEN (2022, 141) proposed that Pythodoris might have aspired to maintain the Bosporean kingdom following Polemon, just as occurred with Pontus. We will not engage in the debate on whether Strabo wrote the *Geography* under the patronage of Pythodoris, although their relationship seems clear, as does their affinity on certain viewpoints: see, above all, BRAUND 2005b. For summaries of this controversy, see CLARKE 1997, 99, 103–4; DUECK 2000, 163–4; and further ROLLER 2018, 710. Strabo (7.4.6) mentions Hypsicrates (supposedly Hypsicrates of Amisus, *BNJ* 190 F 2) as a source on Asander, the leader who deposed Pharnaces II in 47 and would later marry Dynamis. Strabo regards Pharnaces and Polemon as *basileis* in 12.3.38 and 13.4.3, although, when mentioning them alongside Asander (11.2.11), he refers to them simply as *hegemones*. For Strabo's particular sources on northern Euxine, see BRAUND 2005a, 231–2.

44 On this change, see recently KUZMIN 2024. On Agrippa's campaign, see in general RODDAZ 1984, 463–8; POWELL 2015, 172–3.

45 See respectively Strab. 7.4.3: ἐξ ἐκείνου δὴ τοῦ χρόνου (*i.e.* Mithridates') τοῖς τοῦ Βοσπόρου δυνάσταις ἢ τῶν Χερρονησιτῶν πόλις ὀπήκοος μέχρι νῦν ἐστὶ, and 7.4.7: νῦν ὑπὸ τοῖς τῶν Βοσποριανῶν βασιλεῦσιν, οὗς ἂν Ῥωμαῖοι καταστήσωσιν, ἅπαντά ἐστιν. A contemptuous view of the Bosporean rulers can be found in Flavius Josephus (Joseph. *BJ* 2.366–367), an author who drew extensively on Strabo's work (on this influence, see *e.g.* GALIMBERTI 2007). See further above n. 43, and DUECK 2003, 265.

46 BALLESTEROS PASTOR 2017.

47 See IVANTCHIK/TOKHTAS'EV 2011; COŞKUN/STERN 2021, 201–4, for sources.

48 BRAUND 2005a, 233–4; BOWERSOCK 2013, 386–8. In general, on Mithridates Eupator, see REINACH 1890; OLSHAUSEN 1978; OLSHAUSEN 2000; MCGING 1986; BALLESTEROS PASTOR 1996; BALLESTEROS PASTOR 2013; DE CALLATAÏ 1997; MASTROCINQUE 1999; HØJTE 2009; ROLLER 2020, 97–216.

had incorporated into their national epic.<sup>49</sup> It is true that Mithridates was more recent, and there were Romans who did not forget the Mithridatic wars: recall, for instance, how Gnaeus Piso the Elder (*cos.* 7 BC), probably a friend of Strabo, reproached the Athenians for their betrayal of Rome in supporting the king of Pontus over a century earlier.<sup>50</sup> Similarly, the massacres of the Mithridatic wars, and particularly the so-called “Ephesian Vespers”, were remembered by writers of the Julio-Claudian period.<sup>51</sup> Other disasters brought about by the king’s generals, such as the devastation of Delos, also remained present.<sup>52</sup> However, to a large extent, this epoch was a relic of the past: in Strabo’s time, the territories of Anatolian Pontus were under the control of Roman emperors or client rulers, some of whom were descendants of the Mithridatids, and as a result those distant lands had become a part of the empire or its sphere of influence.<sup>53</sup>

This same ambivalence is evident in Strabo himself. He seems to nostalgically recall the times of Eupator, when his country was significant in the Near East and the Eastern Mediterranean, and also important to Rome, in some respects even decisive. In this sense, it would elevate Strabo’s barbarian origins. Our author claims to have read some “historians of the Mithridatic wars”, whom he finds particularly reliable, but this does not translate into an abundance of details about the great king of Pontus.<sup>54</sup> It is true that Mithridates appears in *Geography* as a *primus inventor* and, to some extent, as a civilising hero, having been the first to subdue the northeastern coast of the Euxine with his armies while uniting his Anatolian domains with Colchis, annexing a region inhabited by warlike peoples.<sup>55</sup>

However, Mithridates and his dynasty are not particularly well treated in Strabo’s work. Unlike in the writings of Cicero, Sallust, Velleius, Florus, or Appian, not to mention other authors, the *Geography* offers no valuation, positive or negative, of this monarch.<sup>56</sup> Likewise, despite his fame as a great general, Mithridates is not described in any military action; even at the battle of the Amnias, which is commonly considered the beginning of the Mithridatic Wars, Strabo makes it clear that the king was not at the

49 On the comparison between Mithridates and Hannibal, see Vell. 2.18.1. Modern scholars have linked the king’s final plans to invade Italy from the North with Hannibal (MCGING 1986, 122, 165; SONNABEND 1998).

50 Tac. *ann.* 2.55.1; BALLESTEROS PASTOR 2005, 386. On the presumed relationship between Piso and Strabo, see Strab. 2.5.33; DUECK, 2000, 88, 140; POTHECARY 2002, 397–8; CAMPANILE 2005.

51 Vell. 2.38.1; Val. Max. 9.2 ext. 3; Liv. *per.* 78. For further references, see below n. 62.

52 Strab. 10.5.4; cf. BOWERSOCK 2013, 385, who ascribes to Strabo a justification for this sack that the *Geography* does not record.

53 On the provincialisation of Pontus, see MAREK 1993, 33–41; BALLESTEROS PASTOR 1996, 394–5; SØRENSEN 2016, 107–82; MADSEN 2020; COŞKUN 2021b.

54 Strab. 11.2.14. Traditionally, οἱ δὲ τὰ Μιθριδατικά συγγράψαντες is interpreted as ‘writers on the Mithridatic Wars’, following Jacoby’s criterion (*FGrHist* IIIc 168, p. 65); however, one could also consider that it might refer to writers about Mithridates in general: cf. GOUKOWSKY 2001, CV; and further BIFFI 2010. Mithridates had historians in his entourage at least until his flight from Pompey in 66 BC: Oros. 6.4.6.

55 See, respectively, Strab. 1.2.1; 12.3.1; 12.3.18; 12.3.28; 12.3.29; BRAUND 2005a, 223; BIFFI 2010, 51–2, 118–9. On these peoples, vd. supra n. 5.

56 On these assessments, see Cic. *Mur.* 15; *Acad.* 2.1.3; App. *Mithr.* 113; cf. 114; Plin. *nat.* 25.5; cf. 23.149; Plut. *comp. Lysander-Sulla* 4; Flor. *epit.* 1.40.1–2; BALLESTEROS PASTOR 2013, 115–6.

head of the army as he was still on the way.<sup>57</sup> Diophantus' campaigns in Crimea and the Bosporean kingdom receive particularly detailed treatment in the *Geography*, but their protagonist is not Eupator but this Sinopean *strategos*, a dignitary of Greek origin.<sup>58</sup> Mithridates appears as a protector of tyrants of cruel and dishonourable conduct, such as the last ones who ruled Athens, and notably the tyrant who governed Sinope with the support of the eunuch Bacchides, commander of the royal troops during Lucullus' blockade.<sup>59</sup> Strabo states that the Sinopeans were being besieged both internally and externally: that is, the royal troops had constrained the will of the citizens, who would have been well disposed to surrender the city to the Romans. This *topos* also appears in sources concerning Heraclea Pontica and Athens, both of which suffered Roman sieges due to housing Pontic garrisons as well.<sup>60</sup> Similarly, the *Geography* tells us that the Chersonesites of Crimea had no other option but to side with the king's cause. Indeed, he had saved them from the Scythians, but according to Strabo, the decision of those Greeks was not very enthusiastic.<sup>61</sup> We can therefore assert that, in general terms, Mithridates appeared as an oppressor of the Greeks, whom he had dominated and dragged into war against Rome, although it is also true that *Geography* does not mention the "Ephesian Vespers", which, as we have said, were recounted by most writers who dealt with Mithridates.<sup>62</sup> Just as we see in Memnon, and less clearly in other authors, Strabo considers Eupator's campaigns in the Euxine as preparatory for the subsequent war against Rome. In other words, Strabo echoes the widely held view that this monarch had planned to confront the Romans from the very beginning of his reign, and thus the Mithridatic Wars would appear as an inevitable misfortune.<sup>63</sup>

Alongside this, we observe that other Mithridatid rulers are not particularly well treated in *Geography*. Of Pharnaces I, Eupator's grandfather, it is said that he "enslaved"

57 Strab. 12.3.40; Memnon *BNJ* 434 F1, 22.6–7; Val. Fl., 22.6–7; App. *Mithr.* 17–18.

58 On this campaign, see Strab. 7.4.3–7, as well as the inscription from Chersonesus honouring this general: *Syll.*<sup>3</sup> 709 = *IOSPE* I<sup>2</sup> 352; *SEG* 30, 1980, 963; CHANIOTIS 1987; BOFFO 1989; GAVRILOV 1996.

59 Strab. 12.3.11; PORTANOVA 1988, 219–20; BALLESTEROS PASTOR 1996, 58; Memnon (*BNJ* 434 F1, 37) and Plutarch (*Luc.* 23.2) do not mention Bacchides, which has led to presume that Strabo was mistaken: JANKE 1963, 117. Strabo tells about a tyrant in Sinope; LASSERRE 1980, 160 n. 3, identified him with Cleochares, probably a *phrourarch*, cited also by Orosius (6.3.2): cf. *contra* DAVAZE 2014, 739. Although Strabo refers by name only to the tyrant Aristion in Athens, he states that Mithridates appointed several tyrants in the city (9.1.18, 20).

60 Strab. 12.3.11; Memnon *BNJ*<sub>2</sub> 434 F1, 37; Plut. *Lucullus* 23.2 (Sinope); *Sull.* 11.1; Oros. 6.3.3; Vell. 2.23.4; Eutr. 5.6.1; cf. Paus. 1.20.5; App. *Mithr.* 28 (Athens); Memnon *BNJ* 434 F1 35.2–5 (Heraclea).

61 Strab. 7.4.3: αὐτῆ (sc. Chersonesus) δ' ἦν πρότερον αὐτόνομος, πορθουμένη δὲ ὑπὸ τῶν βαρβάρων ἠναγκάσθη προστάτην ἐλέσθαι Μιθριδάτην τὸν Εὐπάτορα. On this point of view, see above all Boffo 1989, 237–40.

62 On the "Ephesian Vespers", see BALLESTEROS PASTOR 1996, 103–7; THORNTON 1998; ISAYEV 2017, 50–2.

63 Strab. 7.4.3; Memnon *BNJ* 434 F1, 22.4. This opinion was regarded as the result of the biased nature of Strabo's sources: BOFFO 1989, 328 n. 115. See further Just. *Epit.* 38.3.1, 38.3.7; App. *Mithr.* 13, 57; BALLESTEROS PASTOR 2013, 203–4, 216. In fact, Justin (37.1.7) suggests that Eupator fought with Rome during the whole of his reign (cf. *Commenta Bernensia in Lucanum* 2.581); SALOMONE GAGGERO 1979, 135. Nevertheless, some sources reveal that the swift expansion of Mithridates' power in 89/88 BC was unexpected (Poseid. *BNJ* 87 F 36 *apud* Ath. 5.212f–213a; Plut. *Sull.* 11.1; cf. Flor. *epit.* 1.40.5; Just. *Epit.* 38.5.1), which is confirmed by the significant increase of Pontic coins since the spring of 89 BC (DE CALLATAÏ 1997, 282; and for further arguments BALLESTEROS PASTOR 2013, 204–6).