

УДК 94(37):94(356)
DOI

**“...PROSPERAE IN ARMENIA RES ADDIDERANT”:
CORBULO, TACITUS AND CONSTRUCTING THE IMAGES OF
ROME’S EARLY IMPERIAL CAMPAIGNS IN ARMENIA**

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The Roman historiography of the early Antonine era is represented by the works of Tacitus, whose texts are our main source for the attempts to solve certain problems of the history of early imperial Rome and the history of the surrounding regions. In this context, two central problems arise and still remain: the search for the origins of those models that Tacitus used as the basis for his description of the situation in Armenia in the middle of the 1st century CE and on the other hand – the actual problems of using the evidence of Tacitus for the reconstruction of the events of Nero’s time which, in our opinion even in Tacitus’s works seems to be more complicated than the events of Corbulo’s activity in the East. Using the example of Rome’s policy in the Caucasus region, the author states, that for a proper reconstruction of Rome’s military policy in the East, we need to take into account the contexts and approaches with which Tacitus wrote his text, and in which his own narrative strategies were ephemerally combined. The first of them was the inclusion of major military and political events in the context of the activities of prominent political figures of the era. The role of “key bright figures” in the age of Julius-Claudius becomes dominant. To some extent, it is the role of prominent figures in history (but not Emperors) that lies at the heart of how Tacitus constructs Rome’s past. The discussion over the early provincial offices of Corbulo at this point cannot be solved clearly. In the time of Augustus, the role of the Emperor at this time becomes quite important – he coordinated and controlled foreign policy measures, either personally or through his relatives and friends. Tiberius tries to strengthen the position of the provincial administration, and this policy proved to be effective. Neither Caligula nor Claudius particularly changed the trend set by their predecessors. For the Armenian campaigns of Rome at the time of Nero, Corbulo became the main figure for the narrative of Tacitus. Corbulo, as the author states, did not act as a *protégé* of certain circles at the imperial court, but within the framework of practices already common to the imperial court and provincial administration. Corbulo, despite the fact that his unique role was no more than a narrative strategy that reflected the practices of the era and despite the fact that the reconstruction of his powers and actual influence, according to most of existing scholarship, is problematic, in hands of Tacitus acts as the figure who is the creator of all politics Rome in the Caucasus region. Secondly, the narrative of Tacitus can be placed in the larger context of the age of Hadrian, when the Romans were forced to abandon the provinces created by Trajan and the conquered territories and retreat. The impossibility of destroying Parthian power in the region by military means prompted Roman authors to seek an explanation for the events witnessed by the Romans. Against all this background, in fact, lies the actual course of the Roman-Parthian conflict in the age of Nero, which requires the researcher to pay close attention and which reminds him once again that his predecessors, even in the ancient era, wrote histories based as on their subjective ideas and questions that worried their contemporaries.

Keywords: Roman Empire, Tacitus, Armenia, Corbulo, Roman historiography.

Among the authors of the Ancient Roman historical tradition, Tacitus occupies a special place – and for a good reason. His works not only form the main basis for the reconstruction of the events related to the foreign policy of Rome during the Early Imperial Age – for some of them they actually are the only surviving source. A review of special studies and literature that overlooks both Tacitus himself and his texts would require a separate special study. Despite all the existing works, the questions of how the texts of the Roman historian can be used for different problems of Roman history will remain. In this context, the situation is clearer with the works that tried to evaluate Tacitus's contribution to the study of Parthian issues and, in addition, that are specifically focused on the source-based analysis of individual episodes of Roman political activity that are presented in the works of the ancient historian. One of those questions which however still cause a lot of debate is the picture of Rome's campaigns in Armenia in the time of Nero and the place of Corbulo in those events. The great R. Syme himself first noted that the place given to Corbulo in Tacitus's descriptions of Armenian wars seems to look quite odd¹. The following decades created some attempts to answer the motives of such attention to Corbulo and to the character of events that were described by the Roman historian², but in the end the main questions still remain – how accurate was Tacitus in his descriptions of Nero's wars with Parthia, why so much attention is given to Corbulo and furthermore – how did the text written by Tacitus in the early 2nd century CE correspond with the events of his own age?

The subject of our research is the construction of the image of Roman campaigns in Armenia during the time of Nero in the context of the text, author and the time of Tacitus himself.

For modern scholars, "History" and "Annals" are the main (but not the only) texts created by Tacitus that can be used for the study of both – the key aspects of Roman-Parthian relations, and, secondly – of how exactly the Romans formed the image of Parthia in their culture.

It is significant that the works of Tacitus became decisive for certain hypotheses that are found in historiography, despite the fact that the basic fragments of the texts are often interpreted quite literally and uncritically. Thus, H. Sonnabend pointed to Tacitus's possible reflection of the idea of a "divided world", – the concept of "two worlds", which, in his opinion, was created by the Romans in the age of Augustus and reflected the acceptance of the impossibility of conquering Parthia and recognition of her right to "her" part of the world³. The weaknesses of this hypothesis were pointed

¹ Ronald Syme, *Tacitus*. Volumes I and II. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958), 493.

² See the general overview of the studies in Frederik Juliaan Vervaeke, "Tacitus, Domitius Corbulo and Traianus' Bellum Parthicum", *L'Antiquité Classique* 68 (1999): 289–297.

³ Holger Sonnabend, *Fremdenbild und Politik: Vorstellungen der Römer von Ägypten und dem Partherreich in der späten Republik und frühen Kaiserzeit*. (Peter Lang GmbH, Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften, 1986), 114.

out by C. Lerouge⁴. In the narrative of the age of Augustus, the themes of conquest and resistance do not appear as clearly as Sonnabend tries to demonstrate, and Tacitus is not so unambiguous either.

Other tried to interpret the words put by Tacitus in the mouth of Artabanus III⁵ about the limits to which Parthia should be expanded. Following the idea of J. Wolsky⁶, R. Shayegan⁷, M. Marciak⁸ further developed the concept of the existence of a certain “program” that the Arsakids had to follow in their foreign policy and that appealed to the territorial boundaries of the Achaemenid Empire. Their opponents point out that the political history of the Arsakids in general weakly confirms the existence of a clear “foreign policy course”, and J. Nabel⁹ proves that the relevant fragment of the text of Tacitus, which constitutes a significant part of the argument, should be considered exclusively as a rhetorical narrative example, which are already typical to the Roman tradition of describing “translatio imperii”¹⁰, when the image of “new Persians” was transferred to the Arsakids.

Tacitus mostly avoids any comparisons or evaluations of periods outside those events of the 1st century CE which are the basis of his works. Only in some exceptional cases does he mention the events of the Republic era. E. Dąbrowa noticed that such a choice of subjects by Tacitus can be both a consequence of the desire to follow to the chosen chronological structure, and be determined by other reasons and depend on the internal Roman realities caused by the rule of the Flavian and early Antonine periods¹¹.

Some have already concluded that the image formed by Tacitus probably has a dualistic character¹², which is often not taken into account by scholars who work on the topic. On the one hand, although not everywhere, he clearly conveys “Eastern”, “Persian” features (cruelty of monarchs, “Eastern despotism”¹³, fratricidal conflicts,

⁴ Charlotte Lerouge, *L'Image des Parthes dans le Monde Greco-Romain*. (Franz Steiner Verlag, 2007), 76.

⁵ Tacitus, *Annals: Books 4–6, 11–12*. (Loeb Classical Library 312, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1937), VI, 31.

⁶ Joseph Wolski, “Les Achéménides et les Arsacides. Contribution à l’histoire de la formation des traditions iraniennes”, *Syria* 43 (1966): 65–89.

⁷ Rahim Shayegan, “Persianism: or Achaemenid Reminiscences. Iranian and Iranicate World(s) of Antiquity”, *Persianism in Antiquity*, ed. R. Strootman, M. J. Versluys. (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2017), 401–455.

⁸ Michal Marciak, *Sophene, Gordyene, and Adiabene Three Regna Minora of Northern Mesopotamia Between East and West*. (Brill, Leiden and Boston, 2017), 47.

⁹ Jake Nabel, “Exemplary History and Arsacid Genealogy in Tacitus, Annals 6.31”, *Dabir (The Digital Archive of Brief Notes & Iran Review)* 7 (2020): 175–191.

¹⁰ Sonnabend, *Fremdenbild und Politik: Vorstellungen der Römer von Ägypten und dem Partherreich in der späten Republik und frühen Kaiserzeit*, 17–19.

¹¹ Edward Dąbrowa, “Tacitus on the Parthians”, *Electrum* 24 (2017): 171–189.

¹² Nabel, “Exemplary History and Arsacid Genealogy in Tacitus, Annals 6.31”, 175–176; Elizabeth Keitel, “The Role of Parthia and Armenia in Tacitus Annals 11 and 12”, *The American Journal of Philology*. Vol. 99, No. 4 (Winter, 1978): 462–473.

barbaric polygyny, the influence of women on state politics) when he talks about Parthians, and from the secondly – in his descriptions of “external” plots, he often resorts to parallelism of the realities of Rome of the Julio-Claudian era and Parthia at the level of the structural construction of the text. References to family disputes of the house of Arsakids act as a background for disagreements in the Roman imperial family. The accusation against Vonones is reflected in the criticism of Nero¹⁴, and the “gynocracy” of the Parthians and Armenians is presented as the background for the descriptions of the political influence of Livia and Agrippina the Younger. The political “terror” arranged by Artabanus is mentioned with the Tiberius’ political persecutions¹⁵. According to E. Keitel, the description of Parthia and Armenia in the 11th and 12th books of the “Annals” seem to work as an allusion to the situation of Rome in the time of the early 1st century CE¹⁶.

It seems that the image of Parthia and its relations with Rome left by Tacitus reflects the transformations of the stereotypical image of the “other world”, which was already familiar to the Romans at that time with the parallels between the Parthian and Roman history through which the reader was presented with the actual Roman past of the Julio–Claudian era, taking into account the conjuncture of the beginning of the 2nd century CE¹⁷.

In this context, two central problems arise and still remain: the search for the origins of those models that Tacitus used as the basis for his description of the situation in Armenia in the middle of the 1st century CE and on the other hand – the actual problems of using the evidence of Tacitus for the reconstruction of the events of Nero’s time which, in our opinion even in Tacitus’s works seems to be more complicated than the events of Corbulo’s activity in the East.

Tacitus clearly indicates that it was the war between the Armenians and the Iberians that caused the extreme tension in the relations between the Parthians and the Romans. The Iberian king Pharasmanes was afraid that his son Radamistus would overthrow him¹⁸. Trying to direct the energy of the young prince somewhere, he remembered his brother Mithridates of Armenia¹⁹. Therefore, he advised his son to make a *coup d’etat* and seize power himself²⁰.

Pharasmanes decided to take an armed stand and took as a reason for the attack an old case when he once tried to turn to the Romans during the war with the Albanians,

¹³ Tacitus, *Annals*, XI, 8, 2; Tacitus. *Annals: Books 13–16*. (Loeb Classical Library 322, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1937), XV, 15.

¹⁴ Tacitus, *Annals*, XV, 33.

¹⁵ Tacitus, *Annals*, VI, 31.

¹⁶ Keitel, “The Role of Parthia and Armenia in Tacitus Annals 11 and 12”, 462–471.

¹⁷ Vervaeke, “Tacitus, Domitius Corbulo and Traianus’ Bellum Parthicum”, 290–292; Keitel, “The Role of Parthia and Armenia in Tacitus Annals 11 and 12”, 462–471.

¹⁸ “Eodem anno bellum inter Armenios Hiberosque exortum Parthis quoque ac Romanis gravissimorum inter se motuum causa fuit”, Tacitus, *Annals*, XII, 44.

¹⁹ Tacitus, *Annals*, XII, 44.

²⁰ Tacitus, *Annals*, XII, 44.

but his brother did not agree to this. As if in revenge, he went on a campaign and transferred a significant part of the troops under the command of his son²¹. Mithridates, which was pushed from the plains, fled to the fortress of Hornea, where he hid together with the Roman garrison commanded by the prefect Caelius Pollio and the centurion Casperius²².

Pollio received a bribe and he began to persuade Mithridates to make peace with Radamistus and Pharasmanes²³. Casperius arrived to Pharasmanes and began to demand that the siege of the fortress has to stop. Pollio's "salary" was increased, and constantly persuading the Armenian king, he forced him to leave the walls of the fortress²⁴. Radamistus met him and, apparently with the aim of making an oath before concluding the contract, captured him, and then killed along with his wife and children²⁵.

Quadratus, a governor of Syria at the time, learned about the situation in Armenia and convened a meeting to decide what should be done. The majority of Roman officials decided that the disputes among the barbarians were beneficial to the Roman state and that it was not necessary to change anything significantly or interfere. However, in case the emperor was dissatisfied with their reaction, they sent envoys to Pharasmanes with a demand to leave Armenia²⁶.

The procurator of Cappadocia, Julius Pelignus, who was on good terms with the emperor Claudius, went to Armenia together with the army, as if to reconquer it. However, his allies suffered more than his enemies from the robberies committed by his legionnaires, and when he arrived to Radamistus, he began to persuade him to wear the royal insignia of power and was himself present at their adoption²⁷.

When word of his actions spread, a legion led by Helvitus was sent to Armenia by Prisk to put an end to this chaos and act at his own discretion. After crossing the Taurus Mountains, he was first ordered to act more by diplomacy than by force, but the next order generally required him to return to Syria, in order not to provoke a war with the Parthians²⁸.

Vologeses, who became king in 51 CE²⁹, began to raise troops to make his brother Tiridates king there³⁰. He went on a campaign and actually expelled the Iberians without a fight. The cities of Tigranokertes and Artaxatas surrendered to him³¹. But the onset of winter and the lack of food and supplies forced Vologeses to stop the campaign.

²¹ Tacitus, *Annals*, XII, 45.

²² Ibid, 45.

²³ Ibid, 46.

²⁴ Ibid, 46.

²⁵ Ibid, 47.

²⁶ Ibid, 48.

²⁷ Ibid, 49.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Edward Dąbrowa, "Parthian-Armenian Relations from the 2nd Century BCE to the Second Half of the 1st Century CE", *Electrum* 28 (2021): 50.

³⁰ Tacitus, *Annals*, XII, 50.

³¹ Leonardo Gregoratti, "Corbulo versus Vologases: A Game of Chess for Armenia", *Electrum* 24 (2017): 107–121.

Radamistus entered Armenia again, but a rebellion began against him and he was forced to flee. The extremely unstable domestic political situation in Armenia led to a large-scale political struggle. As a result, the Armenian nobility supported the Parthian claimant to the throne, which essentially meant the collapse of Roman policy in the East and the loss of Rome's control over Armenia.

At the end of 54 CE, rumors about the events in the East reached Rome. The new emperor – Nero, who only turned seventeen years old, decided to take control of the situation³². He gave the order to start recruiting young people in the nearby provinces to replenish the eastern legions, and the legions themselves were redeployed to the border with Armenia³³. The ancient allies of the Romans, kings Agrippa and Antiochus, were ordered to prepare troops for an attack on Parthia and to lead bridges across the Euphrates³⁴.

At the same time, in 55 CE³⁵, the son of Vologeses – Vardanes started a rebellion against his father and Vologeses left Armenia. In the senate, the last event was especially exaggerated and it was even suggested that the *princeps* should enter Rome with an ovation. In honor of the emperor, it was proposed to erect a statue of Nero in the temple of Mars Ultor, and of the same size as the statue of Mars himself³⁶. After this chaotic for some part description of events, Tacitus introduces our main hero and writes that the general approval caused the appointment of the commander of the troops in the East – Corbulo himself³⁷, who in the other works “Histories” is mentioned as the one “which reputation both Corbulo, as commander, and success in Armenia had made larger” (translation by Clifford H. Moore)³⁸.

Both Corbulus and Quadratus sent embassies to the Parthians with a proposal not to enter the war, but to hand over the most important Parthians as hostages to Rome and show, like the previous kings, their respect for the Roman people³⁹. Vologeses, seeking either to prepare for war unhindered or to eliminate in this way those of the nobles who hindered him, decides to give hostages the most important of the Arsakids. They were received by the centurion who was sent by Quadratus, and Corbulo, learning about this, ordered Arius Varus to take the hostages from the centurion⁴⁰. A conflict arose and the hostages were given the right to choose whose escort they should be with. The Parthians chose the prefect Varus. Quadratus began to complain that he had lost the result of his efforts, and Corbulo emphasized that the whole

³² John F. Drinkwater, *Nero. Emperor and Court*. (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 131–140.

³³ Tacitus, *Annals*, XIII, 7.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ Leonardo Gregoratti, “Corbulo versus Vologases: A Game of Chess for Armenia”, 133.

³⁶ Tacitus, *Annals*, XIII, 8.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

³⁸ “quam gloriam et dux Corbulo et prosperae in Armenia res addiderant”, Tacitus, *Histories: Books I–3*. (Loeb Classical Library 111, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1925), III, 6.

³⁹ Tacitus, *Annals*, XIII, 8.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

mission of 55 CE succeeded only because the Parthians heard of his presence in the region⁴¹.

However despite that, at the beginning of the year 57 CE, the war with the Parthians took on particularly acute forms, since Vologeses could not allow his brother Tiridates to be deprived of the throne, and Corbulo appealed to the fact that the Roman people should return what they had won in the time of Lucullus and Pompey⁴².

In 58 CE the problem of combat capability of Roman troops arose because the legions that arrived in Syria consisted of soldiers who had not fought for a long time and with great difficulty performed any work in the camp. All the legionnaires who were unfit for service were dismissed, and new recruitments began in Galatia and Cappadocia, in addition, they transferred the legion from Germany, which arrived with the cavalry of auxiliary troops⁴³. For wintering in the late autumn of 57 CE, the legions remained in camp and the harsh winter became unbearable for many⁴⁴. In the spring, Corbulo stationed his troops on the fortifications, ordering them not to be the first to enter the battle. Romans, however, were involved in some minor battles⁴⁵. Tiridates started military operations and Corbulo, dividing the troops into separate detachments, decided to launch an attack on Armenia in several directions at the same time⁴⁶. In addition, Antiochus and Pharasmanes were to initiate the same actions.

Observing the extremely unfavorable situation, Tiridates began negotiations⁴⁷. Corbulo knew that Vologeses himself was absent not because of peaceful intentions, but because of the rebellion in Hyrcania and advised Tiridates to turn to Caesar and only in this way he would gain power over Armenia. Tiridates began to retreat with a not entirely clear purpose, perhaps trying to cut off the supply of food to the Romans from the Pontus side⁴⁸, but he did not succeed, since the Roman garrisons were located in the mountains, and Corbulo in order not to prolong the war decided to start storming Armenian fortresses in the summer of 58 CE⁴⁹. The Parthians tried to attack from time to time, when the Roman army was on the march, but they could not do anything. With the onset of dusk, Tiridates retreated⁵⁰.

Corbulo suggested that Tiridates had retreated to Artaxata, but intelligence suggested that he had gone to Media Atropatena or to Albania. The townspeople of Artaxata opened the gates, thereby saving themselves from physical extermination. In the spring of 60 CE, the Romans did not think of anything better than to burn and

⁴¹ Tacitus, *Annals*, XIII, 9.

⁴² Ibid, 34.

⁴³ Ibid, 35.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 35.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 36.

⁴⁶ Ibid, 37.

⁴⁷ Ibid, 37.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 39.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 39.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 40.

destroy the city, because without a strong garrison they were unable to defend it, and they considered it inappropriate to leave the fortifications to the enemy⁵¹.

The soldiers proclaimed Nero emperor, a triumphal arch was built, and the senate approved prayers in honor of the Emperor and assigned him consulship for several years to come⁵². Corbulo wanted to go to Tigranocerta to capture it. He treated the Armenians who came to him differently⁵³. On the march, his troops were attacked by the Mardi tribes and the Iberians were sent against them. Only at the end of the summer did they manage to reach more or less favorable areas for life and the tired army began to take the harvest from the local population⁵⁴. Two unknown fortresses were captured and the news arrived that Tigranocerta surrendered to the Romans, thanks to which none of its inhabitants were harmed⁵⁵.

The Legerda fortress still had to be stormed and taken only because of the war between the Hyrcanians and the Parthians, and the last ones could not provide any help. At the same time, the Hyrcanian embassy arrived to Corbulo, and negotiations were held on joint actions against the Parthians⁵⁶. When the embassy was sent back, the Romans helped the Hyrcanians so that they would not fall into the hands of the Parthians. Nero, believing that Armenia was actually under the control of the Romans, sent a new Armenian king – Tigranes, who came from the Cappadocian nobility and was the grandson of King Archelaus and the great-grandson of Herod the Great from Judea⁵⁷. He arrived at the end of the summer of 60 CE and was given a guard of a thousand legionnaires, two allied cohorts and two detachments of auxiliary cavalry, and in order to maintain stability in Armenia, its border areas had to be subordinated not to Tigranes, but to the neighboring kings – Pharasmanes, Polemones, Aristobulus and Antiochus. At the same time, the governor of Syria Ummidius Quadratus died and Corbulo went to Syria to take over the province⁵⁸.

Vologeses decided to restore the power of the Parthians in Armenia. He decided to use Tigranes attack on Adiabena as an excuse for his actions. Monobazes appealed to the Parthian nobility for help, but there was no clear reaction⁵⁹. Vologeses' speech, as it was constructed by Tacitus is indicative, where it was said that it is necessary to expel the Romans from Armenia and take revenge for the wrongs inflicted on the Parthians⁶⁰.

Corbulo began to prepare for the defense of Syria, as at this time there was a direct threat to the province for the first time since the civil wars. Two legions were

⁵¹ Everett L. Wheeler, "The Chronology of Corbulo in Armenia", *Klio* 79 (2) (1997): 383–397.

⁵² Tacitus, *Annals*, XIII, 41.

⁵³ *Ibid*, 23.

⁵⁴ Tacitus, *Annals*, XIV, 24.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 24.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 25.

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 26.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*.

⁵⁹ Tacitus, *Annals*, XV, 1.

⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 2.

sent to help the Armenians in 60 CE⁶¹. Corbulo wrote to Nero that a special commander should be appointed for the defense of Armenia, as there was a direct threat to Syria. In the meantime, he began to place legions on the banks of the Euphrates and arm the detachments of the provincials. At this time, Parthians attacked Tigranes, who managed to hide in Tigranokerta, where the Roman garrison was located⁶².

Corbulo, despite certain successes, assessed the situation extremely soberly and decided to send an embassy to Vologeses⁶³. Centurion Casperius met Vologeses near Nizibis. Vologeses, said that he would send an embassy to Nero and ordered his forces to retreat⁶⁴.

Many perceived this as a remarkable success, but others pointed out that Corbulo and Vologeses most likely concluded a secret agreement, according to which not only the Parthians left Armenia, but also the Romans with Tigranes, this was indirectly indicated by the departure of the Roman garrison of Tigranokerta and the wintering of Roman troops in Cappadocia, which was completely illogical⁶⁵. Corbulo was accused of sick egotism, as if he wanted anyone but him to be blamed for possible military failures in the East in the spring of 61 CE.

At that time, the new governor of Syria – Csesenius Petus arrived. Petus was assigned to command the fourth, twelfth and fifth legions summoned from Moesia together with auxiliary troops from Pontus, Galatia and Cappadocia, instead Corbulo was left with the third, sixth and tenth legions, as well as the soldiers who were constantly in Syria⁶⁶.

The ambassadors of Vologeses returned from Rome with nothing and the Parthians resumed the war. Petus entered Armenia with two legions⁶⁷. They crossed the Euphrates and marched towards Tigranocerta, bypassing areas that could not be held and plundering everything in their path. In the winter, the supplies ran out and Petus returned, sending a very strange letter to Nero about his significant victories⁶⁸. At that time, as Tacitus points out, because Corbulo was fortifying the Euphrates and the Parthians lost hope of continuing the offensive in the direction of Syria and concentrated their main attention on Armenia⁶⁹.

Petus kept the fifth legion on Pontus, and many soldiers from other legions were on vacation. Having learned about the approach of Vologesos, he summoned the twelfth legion⁷⁰, and chose an extremely disastrous strategy and, once again according to Tacitus, began to make decisions contrary to the advice that was given to him. Pet

⁶¹ Tacitus, *Annals*, XV, 3.

⁶² *Ibid*, 4.

⁶³ *Ibid*, 5.

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 5.

⁶⁵ *Ibid*, 6.

⁶⁶ *Ibid*, 6.

⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 7.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, 8.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 9.

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, 10.

brought the troops out of the winter camp and set out to meet the Parthians. After a scout went missing one day, Petus began to retreat out of fear, but the fact that there was no pursuit gave him the illusion that the enemy was weak. He placed three thousand soldiers for the defense of one of the passes across the Taurus, and he stationed the Pannonian cavalry on the plain⁷¹.

The drama, as Tacitus points out to his reader continued – Petus was barely persuaded to send news of the enemy's approach to his potential savior – Corbulo. Corbulo was not particularly in a hurry, nevertheless he ordered to allocate a thousand soldiers from three legions, eight hundred cavalymen from the allied troops and the same number of soldiers from the allied cohorts⁷². When Vologeses learned about Petus actions, he did not change his intentions and attacked his soldiers with a powerful blow. The troops were dispersed and they fled to the camp near Rhandeia, after which the governor again sent envoys to Corbulo with a request to immediately come to his aid⁷³. Corbulo, leaving part of the troops in Syria, took the shortest route through Commagena and Cappadocia to Armenia⁷⁴.

Vologeses began to attack the besieged more vigorously, and Petus, observing the deterioration of the situation, wrote a letter to Vologeses in which he called for peace⁷⁵. The Parthian king answered ambiguously that he should wait for the arrival of his brothers Pacorus and Tiridates, with whom he would make a decision both about Armenia and about the fate of the Roman legions. Petus began to insist on a personal meeting with Vologeses, but he sent only his chief of cavalry, Vazak. Pet spoke at the meeting about Lucullus and Pompey and about the tradition of possession of Armenia, while Vazak answered him a very important thing, emphasized to the reader of Tacitus – that the control over Armenia by the Romans was rather symbolic, but the real power was with the Parthians⁷⁶. The next day, Monobazus from Adiabena arrived for negotiations and managed to reach the following agreements: the Roman army is released from the siege, but the Romans must leave Armenia and all its fortresses, which will be occupied by the Parthians, after which Vologeses will send an embassy to the emperor⁷⁷.

On the banks of the Euphrates came the long waited unsuccessful savior – Corbulo met Petus and his army. The army and the commander were in a miserable condition. A short but sharp dialogue took place between the commanders⁷⁸. Petus wintered in Cappadocia, and Vologeses sent envoys to Corbulo with the demand to destroy the fortifications across the Euphrates. Corbulo began to demand the liberation of Armenia from the troops, in the end both were fulfilled⁷⁹.

⁷¹ Tacitus, *Annals*, XV, 10.

⁷² Ibid, 9.

⁷³ Ibid, 11.

⁷⁴ Ibid, 12.

⁷⁵ Ibid, 13.

⁷⁶ Ibid, 14.

⁷⁷ Ibid, 14.

⁷⁸ Ibid, 17.

⁷⁹ Ibid, 17.

Meanwhile, in Rome, a triumphal arch was erected and the non-existent victories of Petus, which were personally attributed to the emperor, were celebrated. The Senate began this in the middle of the war, and Nero's actions were less and less adequate⁸⁰. In the early spring of 63 CE, ambassadors arrived from King Vologeses, who rather provocatively declared that the gods had settled the old dispute regarding Armenia, since Vologeses had besieged Tigranes and had recently released the legions of Petus, although he could have destroyed them. His strength is shown to a sufficient extent and Tiridates is ready to make a trip to Rome and upon arrival to the Roman eagles to take the kingdom⁸¹. What the ambassadors said shocked everyone, as it completely contradicted what Petus had written. The centurion, who arrived with the embassy, was asked in what condition he left Armenia. He replied that it was completely abandoned by the Romans⁸². Next, Tacitus reports a very revealing episode of the formation of the foreign policy course of the empire: Nero gathers his closest dignitaries and consults with them about which path should be chosen⁸³. It was decided to continue military operations and Parthian ambassadors were sent with gifts, but without any specific answers. They decided to transfer the command of the troops back to Corbulo, and Gaius was appointed governor of Syria. The fifteenth legion with Marius was transferred from Pannonia to the East. The tetrarchs, kings, prefects and other representatives of the administration in the east were ordered to carry out the orders of Corbulo, whose powers became almost the same as those given to Pompey by *Lex Manilia* to fight against pirates⁸⁴.

The fourth and twelfth legions, as the least capable, were sent to Syria, and Corbulo, with the soldiers of the third, fifth, sixth, and fifteenth legions and divisions from Illyria and Egypt, and the forces of the allied kings, having concentrated them in Melitene, crossed the Euphrates and set out to Armenia along the road that Lucullus once laid⁸⁵.

He received the ambassadors Tiridates and Vologeses and sent with them his centurions who were to convince the Parthians not to wage war, but taking into account the real balance of forces and their own capabilities and not to wage war with the Romans, but to conclude a treaty with them and obtain Armenia peacefully. This episode in the way the Tacitus points it out is completely illogical and incomprehensible considering the intentions with which Nero gave authority to Corbulo, but it can be explained in two ways – either Corbulo tries to convince the Parthians not to engage in hostilities and limit themselves to the recognition of Armenia under Tiridates⁸⁶, formally recognizing the authority of Rome in this matter, which would

⁸⁰ Tacitus, *Annals*, XV,18.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 24.

⁸² *Ibid*, 25.

⁸³ *Ibid*.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 26–27.

⁸⁶ Wheeler, “The Chronology of Corbulo in Armenia”, 387; Ronald Syme, “Domitius Corbulo”, *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Volume 60, November 1970: 27–39.

have to comfort Nero's pride and to give ground for the imperial propaganda⁸⁷ or he gives the general context of how Armenia was lost by Nero in comparison of how the Romans had to leave the newly created by Trajan province.

After that, in 63 CE, at the place of Petus defeat at Rhandaia negotiations took place and all the details of the future performance, which was to take place in Rome, were agreed upon⁸⁸. Tiridates went to Media where he found Pakorus and then to Vologeses. The brother sent letters to Corbulo asking him not to humiliate his brother and to give him consular honors, which Tacitus thought were empty trifles characteristic of barbarians, because the Romans value the power of power, not appearance – an extremely revealing principle for Roman politics⁸⁹. The trip to Rome took place as early as 66 CE along with the ceremony in Rome.

The military campaigns of Nero's time, despite a good start by Corbulo, latter demonstrated the impossibility of a military solution to the problem, and the emperor symbolically crowned Tiridates in 66 CE, however, de facto he lost control over Armenia. Even Tacitus's hero – Corbulo couldn't fix the situation at that time.

The general vision of constructing the image of the Armenian campaigns of Nero's time in the texts of Tacitus generally contains references to several problems. First of all, the widespread perception of Tacitus exclusively as the successor of Sallust in questions related to the selection of separate lines of Rome's foreign policy is generally questionable. Another part of the scholars, based on the narrative in which Tacitus tries to place the historical characters mentioned by him, in particular, Corbulo in the "Procrustean bed" of their own interpretations of the internal politics of the Empire, considering Corbulo on the one hand as a *protégé* of Seneca and Afranius Burrus, or Agrippina directly, and on the other hand – Caesennius Petus receives his place as a person connected with Tigellinus and Poppaea. The peculiarities of Tacitus' description of the corresponding activity of both Corbulo and Caesennius Petus are included in these contexts, and the questions of the actual powers and spheres of responsibility of both key players in the Armenian campaign remain unresolved⁹⁰.

Regarding the chronology of the campaign itself, the most convincing (albeit sometimes debatable) interpretation is proposed by E. Wheeler in his fundamental article of 1998⁹¹. Along with the fact that both in the characteristics of Corbulo's activities and in understanding the fundamental causes of the conflict that is currently occurring in the Caucasus region, we must proceed from the understanding of several fundamental points: first, the campaigns of Rome in the Caucasus were the result of the activities of Rome and Parthia in this region actually from the late 1st c. BCE, and secondly, Tacitus's approach to portraying the special powers that Corbulo received reflects both his narrative techniques, and the general practices of implementing Roman foreign policy in the East.

⁸⁷ Tacitus, *Annals*, XV, 27.

⁸⁸ Tacitus, *Annals*, XV, 28–30.

⁸⁹ Tacitus, *Annals*, XV, 31.

⁹⁰ Drinkwater, *Nero. Emperor and Court*, 131–141.

⁹¹ Wheeler, "The Chronology of Corbulo in Armenia", 383–397.

In the latter context, Nero's contemporaries act as the *de facto* successors of the line of provincial Roman administration in the East, which was established by Tiberius and Claudius. The text left to us by Tacitus and its reconstruction require the analysis of several layers of content, the first block actually reflects Tacitus' own narrative strategies. His earliest work is the biography of Agricola⁹². In the future, a similar approach of Tacitus will be found in other texts as well, for him, the role of "key bright figures" in the age of Julius-Claudius becomes dominant. To some extent, it is the role of prominent figures in history (but not Emperors) that lies at the heart of how he constructs Rome's past. For Tacitus, despite the historical realities of the age of the Julio-Claudians and the fact that it was Augustus who began to use the special missions of his associates (Agrippa) and relatives (grandsons of Augustus – Gaius and Lucius, and his stepson – Tiberius, performed these functions in different eras), and ending with governors of the provinces in the time of Tiberius, he still assigns a special role to Corbulo and his command.

The discussion over the early provincial offices of Corbulo at this point cannot be solved clearly but what was the general logic and where does the mentioned comparison with Pompey's authority come from? The foreign policy of Augustus was formed under the influence of the situation that developed after the end of the civil wars. The memory of the period was still fresh, when the governors of the provinces used the powers and forces given to them to participate in internal political conflicts, so Augustus was cautious about the governors (an example of which was the policy regarding Egypt)⁹³. Therefore, he personally solves the main problems in the foreign policy life of Rome, and where his personal participation was impossible, he resorted to the practice of representative missions, mostly from his immediate environment. In 23 BCE, Agrippa went to the East, and held negotiations with the ambassadors of the Parthian king Phraates. However, it cannot be said unequivocally that Augustus completely removed the governors from foreign policy activities. In 10 BCE Phraates sent his children to Rome, and he handed them over to the governor of Syria, Marcus Titius⁹⁴. Further policy of Rome was connected with the situation in Armenia. In 6 BCE, Augustus nominated Artavazdes as a contender for the throne of Media, however, due to the difficulties that arose, Augustus decided to entrust the case to Tiberius, who latter went into voluntary exile on Rhodes island. In the end, Gaius Caesar Vipsanianus was sent to Armenia⁹⁵.

⁹² Syme, *Tacitus*, 22.

⁹³ Rhiannon Ash, "Following in the Footsteps of Lucullus? Tacitus' Characterisation of Corbulo", *Arethusa*. Vol. 39, No. 2, *Ingens Eloquentiae Materia: Rhetoric and Empire in Tacitus*. (Spring 2006): 355–375.

⁹⁴ Wolski, "Les Achéménides et les Arsacides. Contribution à l'histoire de la formation des traditions iraniennes", 65–89.

⁹⁵ Dąbrowa, "Parthian-Armenian Relations from the 2nd Century BCE to the Second Half of the 1st Century CE", 51.

The most striking episode of the beginning of the reign of Tiberius was the mission of Germanicus to the East and the conflict between the emperor's nephew and the governor of Syria Gnaeus Calpurnius Piso. In addition to carrying out his main task in Armenia, Germanicus carried out transformations in the eastern provinces, and it was on his initiative that the inhabitants of Cappadocia accepted the legate Quintus Veranius, and in Commagene Quintus Servius became the governor. Despite the threatening precedent in the confrontation between the governor and his relative, Tiberius, later went on to strengthen the position of the provincial administration. Tacitus accused Tiberius of the fact that the lack of change in the leadership of the provinces led to the failures of the Romans, while Josephus Flavius believed that the long tenure of capable persons in their positions allowed to ensure peace in the regions and reduced corruption. The eastern policy of Tiberius, given the specifics of the ideas about the "good" and "bad" Emperor, received a rather critical evaluation in the ancient tradition, but the analysis of the reports of the same authors shows the opposite.

In the time of Augustus, the role of the Emperor at this time becomes leading – he coordinated and controlled foreign policy measures, either personally or through his relatives and friends. Tiberius tries to strengthen the position of the provincial administration, and this policy proved to be effective. This was demonstrated by the activity of Lucius Vitellius in 30 CE during Tiridates' attempt to seize the throne in Parthia. Neither Caligula nor Claudius particularly changed the trend set by their predecessors. The movement of the next *protégé* of the Romans to the throne of the Arsakids, Meherdates, in 49 CE, into the Parthian territory, was coordinated by the governor of Syria Gaius Cassius.

Corbulo, despite the fact that his unique role was no more than a narrative strategy that reflected the practices of the era and despite the fact that the reconstruction of his powers and actual influence, according to most of existing scholarship, is problematic, in hands of Tacitus acts as the figure who is the creator of all politics Rome in the Caucasus region. The actions of Corbulon's "rivals", when we read Tacitus carefully, ultimately lead to the problematic consequences that were recorded in Rhandaia.

Another trend, already mentioned above was actually the era during which Tacitus wrote his works. Although Trajan was planning a new campaign in Mesopotamia, his health deteriorated and in August 117 he died in Cilicia⁹⁶. The death of Trajan during his eastern campaign, the policy of Hadrian, who left the newly created eastern provinces were definitely factors and events that were known to the Romans of that age. The need to explain to the internal Roman audience the reasons for the failures in the Parthian campaign required the emergence of a special narrative line and the construction of an image of Roman-Parthian relations in a key that theoretically allowed Parthia to be shown as an equal rival of the Romans, which was impossible to conquer even in the past⁹⁷.

⁹⁶ Vervae, "Tacitus, Domitius Corbulo and Traianus' Bellum Parthicum", 297.

⁹⁷ Keitel, "The Role of Parthia and Armenia in Tacitus Annals 11 and 12", 462–471.

Although the new emperor founded the Parthian Games in honor of the achievements of his predecessor, but the need to explain the fundamental reasons for the failures of the Romans in the province was strong. The question that apparently no researcher has been able to answer so far and apparently will not be able to answer is how conscious were such creative decisions of Tacitus and whether such a construction of his narrative can be considered part of the official ideology. It is quite possible that such an interpretation belonged to him or was part of more global trends in Roman historiography and literary tradition. However, in our opinion, the campaigns of the age of Nero are just such an example that is being constructed Tacitus in view of the realities of that time and era and the audience for which he wrote his text.

Summarizing, it should be noted that the general line of Roman Latin-language historiography of the early Antonine era is best represented by the works of Tacitus, whose texts, despite everything, remain one of the most problematic for their correct and accurate interpretation. These problems are complicated by the fact that, as we noted, often the texts of Tacitus are our only (literally) source for attempts to solve certain problems of the history of Rome and the surrounding regions. Using the example of Rome's policy in the Caucasus region, we tried to show that for a proper reconstruction of Rome's policy, we need to take into account the contexts and approaches with which Tacitus wrote his text, in which his own narrative strategies were ephemerally combined. The first of them was the inclusion of major military and political events in the context of the activities of prominent political figures of the era, who often opposed the Emperors. For the Armenian campaigns of Rome, such an actor became Corbulo, who, as we tried to prove, did not act as a *protégé* of certain circles at the imperial court, but conducted his activities within the framework of practices already common to the imperial court and provincial administration.

Secondly, the narrative Tacitus can be placed in the larger context of the age of Hadrian, when the Romans were forced to abandon the provinces created by Trajan and the conquered territories and retreat. The impossibility of destroying the Parthian power in the region by military means prompted Roman authors to seek an explanation for the events witnessed by the Romans. Against all this background, in fact, lies the actual course of the Roman–Parthian conflict in the age of Nero, which requires the researcher to pay close attention and which reminds him once again that his predecessors, even in the ancient era, wrote histories not so much based on “*sine ira et studia*”⁹⁸ principle, as much as on their subjective ideas and questions that worried their contemporaries.

⁹⁸ Tacitus, *Histories: Books 4–5. Annals: Books 1–3*. (Loeb Classical Library 111, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1925), *Annals*, I, 1.

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**“...PROSPERAE IN ARMENIA RES ADDIDERANT”:
КОРБУЛОН, ТАЦИТ І КОНСТРУЮВАННЯ ОБРАЗІВ КАМПАНІЙ РИМУ
У ВІРМЕНІЇ У ДОБУ РАННЬОЇ ІМПЕРІЇ**

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Серед авторів римської античної історичної традиції Публій Корнелій Тацит займає особливе місце – і не даремно, адже саме його твори лягають в основу реконструкції більшості подій пов’язаних з зовнішньою політикою Риму у добу імперії. Предметом дослідження виступає конструювання образу політики та військових кампаній Риму у Вірменії у добу Нерона у контексті доби самого Тацита. Загальна лінія римської латиномовної історіографії доби ранніх Антонінів найкраще репрезентована саме творчістю Тацита, тексти якого, попри усе, залишаються одними з найбільш проблемних для їх коректної і точної інтерпретації. Проблеми ці ускладнюються тим, що як ми зазначали, часто текст Тацита – наше єдине (буквально) джерело для спроб вирішення певних проблем історії Риму та супутніх регіонів. На прикладі політики Риму у Кавказькому регіоні, ми спробували показати, що в джерелознавчому аспекті, для коректної реконструкції політики Риму нам потрібно враховувати ті контексти та підходи з використанням яких Тацит писав свій текст, у якому ефемерно поєдналися його власні наративні стратегії. Першою з них було вписування великих військово-політичних подій у контекст діяльності чільних політичних діячів епохи, які часто протиставлялись імператорам. Для вірменських кампаній Риму таким діячем став Корбулон, який, як ми доводимо, діяв не як ставленик певних кіл при імператорському дворі, а в рамках звичних уже для імператорського двору і провінційної адміністрації практик. По-друге, наратив Тацита може бути вписаний у ширший контекст доби Адріана, коли римляни змушені були полишити створені Траяном провінції та завойовані території і відступити. Неможливість знищити свого супротивника у регіоні військовим шляхом спонукала римських авторів шукати пояснення для подій свідками яких стали римляни. На всьому цьому фоні, власне і лежить канва фактичного перебігу римо-парфянського протистояння у добу Нерона, яка вимагає у дослідника прискіпливої уваги і яка вкотре нагадує йому, що його попередники, хай навіть і у античну добу писали історії виходячи з своїх суб’єктивних уявлень та питань, які хвилювали їхніх сучасників.

Ключові слова: Римська імперія, Тацит, Вірменія, Парфія, Корбулон, римська історіографія.

Стаття надійшла до редколегії 11.09.2022

Стаття прийнята до друку 10.11.2022

