MITHRIDATES THE PATRICIDE (VAL. MAX. 9.11.EXT.2)*

In a chapter illustrating outrageous words and criminal deeds (*dicta improba aut facta scelerata*), Valerius Maximus, the Tiberian editor of *exempla*, includes in his list of foreign (*externa*) examples reference to an impious son, Mithridates, who fought with his father over who should rule (9.11.ext.2):

> Mitridates autem multo sceleratius, qui non cum fratre de paterno regno, sed cum ipso patre bellum de dominatione gessit. in quo qui aut homines ullos adiutores inuenerit aut deos inuocare ausus sit, † pare admiratione habet †.[1]
>
> Mithridates, however, was much more wicked, he who did not wage war with his brother concerning his father's kingdom, but with his father himself for dominion. It is equally astonishing in this, that either he found any men to help him or that he dared to invoke the gods.

Confusion abounds over the identity of this Mithridates. In his Teubner edition of the *Facta et dicta memorabilia*, John Briscoe lists as parallel passages to this *exemplum* Livy (*Per*. 102), Velleius Paterculus (2.40.1), Josephus (*AJ* 14.53), Plutarch (*Pomp*. 41), Florus (1.40.26), Appian (*Mith*. 110–11), Dio Cassius (37.12), Eutropius (6.12.3) and Orosius (6.5.4–5). These passages all point to Pharnaces, the son of Mithridates of Pontus VI. Briscoe follows Kempf's 1888 edition, where he prints the suggestion (*per litteras*) of the Danish philologist Martin Clarentius Gertz that this Mithridates is to be identified as the father of Pharnaces.[2]

Shackleton Bailey in his Loeb edition comments as follows: 'There may be a textual error here. The person meant is Pharnaces, who in 63 rebelled against his father, the great Mithridates of Pontus (Livy *Per*. 102, Vell. 2.40.1 etc.).'[3] Henry Walker in his translation of Valerius, in a note on Mithridates, states: 'Mithridates VI was king of Pontus from 120 to 63 B.C. He was only eleven years old when his father was murdered.'[4] In the next note, Walker claims: 'Mithridates murdered his mother and brother in the struggle for his father's throne, but never fought against his father. Valerius may be thinking of his son Pharnaces II who rebelled against Mithridates VI and drove him to suicide in 63 B.C.'[5]

* I wish to thank David Wardle for his comments on an earlier draft of this note.

[1] J. Briscoe (ed.), *Valeri Maximi Facta et dicta memorabilia*, 2 vols. (Stuttgart and Leipzig, 1998). Briscoe obelizes the final phrase; my translation, however, follows Halm's emendation: *pare<m> admiratione<m> habet*, which is also accepted by D.R. Shackleton Bailey (ed. and transl.), *Valerius Maximus: Memorable Doings and Sayings*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA, 2000).

[2] K. Kempf (ed.), *Valerii Maximi Factorum et dictorum memorabilium libri novem cum Iulii Paridis et Ianuarii Nepotiani Epitomis* (Leipzig, 1888). The apparatus criticus prints the following: *Mitridatis autem m. sceleratius <Pharnaces filius>*; *Mitridatis* was subsequently emended (by Briscoe and others) to *Mithridates* through comparison with Valerius' epitomator Julius Paris.

[3] Shackleton Bailey (n. 1), 364–5 n. 9.

[4] H.J. Walker, *Valerius Maximus. Memorable Deeds and Sayings. One Thousand Tales from Ancient Rome* (Indianapolis, 2004), 338 n. 205.

[5] Walker (n. 4), 338 n. 206.

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On the basis of the same identification, Faranda, who edited the text of Valerius, claims that 'here Val. Maximus made a serious mistake, it being known from various sources that Mithridates ascended the throne at age 11, after his father had been murdered. It is true, however, that he fought with his mother and his brother, eliminating them' ('Qui Val. Massimo ha commesso un grave errore, essendo notorio da varie fonti che Mitridate sali al trono in età 11 anni, dopo che il padre gli era stato assassinato. Vero è, invece, che egli combatté con la madre e col fratello, eliminandoli').[6]

Clearly the translators and editors of Valerius' text think that he is confused and that he refers instead to the 'murder' of Mithridates VI Eupator Dionysus in 63 by his son Pharnaces.[7] Valerius, however, preserves correctly both the name of Mithridates and the role of the son. The *exemplum* refers, as historians have generally known (despite being vulnerable to misprints in some cases in relation to the reference to Valerius' text), to the Mithridates who betrayed his father, Ariobarzanes, the Satrap of Dascylium in the fourth century B.C.[8]

Aristotle (*Pol*. 5.1312a) mentions the attack of this Mithridates on Ariobarzanes in a moralizing section, which discusses the motivation behind attacking monarchs out of contempt and for gain. Similarly, in a passage on the decline of morality in Asia, Xenophon (*Cyr*. 8.8.4) refers to Mithridates whose betrayal of his own father brought him advantage with the king. Harpocration (s.v. 'Ariobarzanes'), writing probably in the second century A.D., mentions Ariobarzanes' death in the lexical entry under his name, as well as his subsequent crucifixion by Artaxerxes.[9] Harpocration is the only source to mention crucifixion. The remaining ancient sources which refer to Ariobarzanes are collected by Walther Judeich (*RE* 2.1.832–3), from whom part of the confusion probably must arise. For Judeich incorrectly prints 'Val. Max. IV 11 ext. 2'.

Typical of Valerius' exemplary style more generally, the narrative of events is drastically compressed, highlighting only the most basic of facts necessary in order to illustrate the chapter theme.[10] His immediate source for this *exemplum* is unrecoverable,

[6] R. Faranda (ed. and transl.), *Valerio Massimo: Detti e fatti memorabili* (Turin, 1971), ad loc. All translations are mine, unless stated otherwise.

[7] On his death, see n. 12 below. The variorum edition by J. Kappius (ed.), *Valerii Maximi Factorum dictorumque memorabilium libri novem ex editione Joannis Kappii cum notis et interpretatione in usum Delphini, variis lectionibus, notis variorum, recensu editionum et codicum, et indice locupletissimo accurate recensiti*, 3 vols. (London, 1823), 2.876 n. 1, suggests Mithridates, king of Parthia, instead: 'Non Ponticus, populi Romani hostis; qui teste Justino, moriente patre puer erat: sed forte Mithridates Rex Parthorum.'

[8] B.C. McGing, *The Foreign Policy of Mithridates VI Eupator King of Pontus* (Leiden, 1986), 13–15 briefly sketches the dynastic origins of this family; he is, however, guilty of the same error as others below, namely of incorrectly citing Val. Max. 9.11.7 as the *exemplum* discussing Ariobarzanes' death in 362. See also B.C. McGing, 'The kings of Pontus: some problems of identity and date', *RhM* 129 (1986), 248–59; A.B. Bosworth and P.V. Wheatley, 'The origins of the Pontic House', *JHS* 118 (1998), 155–64, at 160 n. 55; P. Debord, *L'Asie Mineure au IVe Siècle (412–323 a. C.). Pouvoirs et Jeux Politiques* (Bordeaux, 1999), 99 n. 129, who misprints Val. Max. 9.11.ext.12; S.M. Burstein, *Outpost of Hellenism: The Emergence of Heraclea on the Black Sea* (Berkeley, 1974), 129 n. 56, who lists 'Valerius Maximus 9.11.2' instead of the external *exemplum* from the same chapter; C.L. Sherman (ed. and transl.), *Diodorus of Sicily*, vol. 7 (London and Cambridge, MA, 1963), 202 n. 1; and M. Weiskopf, *The So-Called "Great Satraps' Revolt", 366–360 B.C.: Concerning Local Instability in the Achaemenid Far West* (Stuttgart, 1989), 26–54.

[9] W. Dindorf (ed.), *Harpocrationis Lexicon in decem oratores Atticos* (Oxford, 1853).

[10] Although the chapter's focus is *dicta improba aut facta scelerata*, parricide specifically is an important aspect running throughout. In 9.11.1, Tullia is complicit in her father's murder; at 9.11.3 Catiline's conspiracy is characterized as parricide; 9.11.5 records a parricide from the triumviral

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and the remaining parallel passages are jejune, as we have seen above, in their descriptions of Mithridates' betrayal of his father; little, therefore, can be said on the details. Given Valerius' general reading patterns, however, Pompeius Trogus is a likely candidate as source—he appears to have dealt with this narrative in the tenth book of his *Philippic Histories*, as is clear from the *prologi* (*Paphlagonon origo repetita: deinde praefectum Hellesponti Ariobarzanen*). The son is also likely to be the Mithridates mentioned at Just. *Epit.* 16.4.7.[11]

The moral interpretation of Mithridates' murder of his father clearly predates Valerius. Within his own chapter, Valerius escalates the severity of the vice from the preceding example, in which two brothers fight over their father's throne after his death. Mithridates was 'much more wicked' (*Mithridates autem multo sceleratius*), because patricide trumps fraternal discord in Valerius' moral hierarchy: *qui non cum fratre de paterno regno, sed cum ipso patre bellum de dominatione gessit*. Valerius then concludes the *exemplum* with details difficult to corroborate, as they are not found elsewhere in the historical record. It appears that Mithridates did not act alone in the murder of his father and also that he acted, or at least thought he did, by the will of the gods—this irreligious behaviour clearly further damns him in Valerius' mind (*in quo qui aut homines ullos adiutores inuenerit aut deos inuocare ausus sit, parem admirationem habet*). The details may remain obscure, but his closing remarks provide a neat conclusion to the *exemplum*, showcasing his moral condemnation of the deed. Correct identification of this exemplar has the added benefit of saving Valerius from contradiction elsewhere on how Mithridates VI of Pontus died.[12]

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period along with 9.11.6; 9.11.ext.3 relates Sariaster's conspiracy against his father Tigranes; and, finally, the climactic *exemplum* of the chapter presents Sejanus' conspiracy against Tiberius as an attempted parricide of the *parens* of Rome.

[11] See Burstein (n. 8), 126 n. 7.

[12] Val. Max. 9.2.ext.3 records that this Mithridates 'forced his struggling breath to succumb to poison' (*ueneno repugnantem spiritum suum tandem succumbere coegit*). Valerius' abbreviated description of Mithridates' 'suicide' elides some of the details of his death. This is possibly because the circumstances surrounding his death are somewhat obscure. One tradition maintains that he tried to commit suicide by poison, but, being immune to its effects because of a lifetime of experiment with toxicology and self-administered antidotes, he requested the Gaul Bituitus to kill him. Another tradition maintains that he was murdered by troops who had deserted to his son; cf. Livy, *Per.* 102; Just. *Epit.* 37.1–2, 37.6; App. *Mith.* 111; Gal. *Ther. Pis.* 14.283–4; Gell. *NA* 17.16; Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 1.76; Oros. 6.5; Flor. 1.40; Plut. *Pomp.* 41; Dio Cass. 37.13.

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