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“TOO MANY FOR AN EMBASSY, TOO FEW FOR AN ARMY”:
ON THE ORIGIN AND SCOPE OF A TIGRANIC DICTUM

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Prior to the battle of Tigranocerta, which took place on the 6th of October 69 BC, the Armenian king Tigranes the Great said to his fellows, after seeing the small size of the Roman troops under L. Licinius Lucullus, that their number would be “too many for an embassy, too few for an army”.¹ Plutarch in his *Life of Lucullus* records this line (*Luc.* 27.4) and so does Memnon of Heraclea in his *Peri Herakleias* (preserved by Photios, FGrH 434 F 1), Appian in his *Mithridateios* (*Mithr.* 85.384), Cassius Dio in the thirty-sixth book of his Roman history (36.1b.2f.) and the compilers of the *Suda* in the lemma ‘Lucullus’ (λ, 688: s.v. Λούκουλλος). Despite this strong and long-lasting Greek tradition, modern scholars reject the quotation as spurious. So for instance Mack Chahin, who writes in his book about *The Kingdom of Armenia* that it is most unlikely that Tigranes uttered such a frivolous witticism in the run-up to the battle, and that “there are no original records ... which tell the true state of affairs of those times in Armenia and in the Armenian dominions”.²

However a look at a number of sources shows that the verdict of Chahin and other scholars needs to be adjusted.³ There is another story where as an arrogant king sees his nemesis approach, someone remarks “the force that is coming is too great for messengers, too small for warriors”. As in the story about Tigranes, the small force proves to be big enough. However, this text is not in Greek but Aramaic, and the extant copy was made at the end of the fourth or beginning of the third century BC. Papyrus Amherst 63 in the J. P. Morgan Library, New York, appears to have been composed for a community of exiles from Raš in the Babylonian-Elamite borderlands who had spent time living at Bethel in Samaria and at Syene below the First Cataract.⁴ The text is in a non-standard dialect of Aramaic, but the script is Demotic, and both language and orthography pose challenges of interpretation. It contains a variety of texts including prayers and liturgy, but in the final section we find the following passage (*col.* XX.8–12):

“Saritra went out of the palace. / They seated her in the chariot. / She set her face toward Babylon. / The watchman climbed / The wall of Babylon. / The watchmen answered and said: / ‘The force that is coming / Is too great for messengers, / Too small for warriors.’ / Saritra was made to descend / From the chariot. / ‘From where is someone like this?’ / ‘I am Saritra, / The sister of / the twins.’”⁵

¹ For the battle and capture of Tigranocerta see: T. Reinach, *Mithridates Eupator. König von Pontos* (Leipzig 1895) 356–361, and K. Eckhardt, Die armenischen Feldzüge des Lukullus, *Klio* 9 (1909) 400–412; K. Eckhardt, Die armenischen Feldzüge des Lukullus II, III, *Klio* 10 (1910) 72–115, 192–231. Texts and translations of Plutarch, Appian and Cassius Dio are taken from the Loeb editions, the other translations are our own. The translation of the papyrus is from K. van der Toorn, *Papyrus Amherst 63* (Münster 2018). Our thanks go to C. Schuler, I. Madreiter, M. Lang and C. Mileta. This research was supported by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council, Canada.

² M. Chahin, *The Kingdom of Armenia* (New York 1991) 201.

³ Similar V. Kurkjian, *A History of Armenia* (New York 1958) 79–80; H. Manandyan, *Tigranes II and Rome. A New Interpretation Based on Primary Sources* (Costa Mesa 2007) 93; different to them are A. Keaveny, *Lucullus. A Life* (London–New York 1992) 108, and A. N. Sherwin-White, Lucullus, Pompey, and the East, *CAH* 9 (1994) 229–273, here 241 – they just cite the dictum without further doubts.

⁴ On the date see: R. C. Steiner, Papyrus Amherst 63. The Aramaic Text, in W. W. Hallo (ed.), *The Context of Scripture 1. Canonical Compositions from the Biblical World* (Leiden 1997) 309–327, here 310; on the location, see R. C. Steiner, The Aramaic Text in Demotic Script: The Liturgy of a New Year’s Festival Imported from Bethel to Syene by Exiles from Rash, *JAOS* 111 (1991) 362–363.

⁵ For the text with philological notes and a short commentary see: van der Toorn, *Papyrus* 225–228; a similar translation gives: R. C. Steiner and C. F. Nims, *The Aramaic Text in Demotic Script: Text, Translations and Notes* (2017), online: <https://repository.yu.edu/handle/20.500.12202/51> (08.02.2018), but with a different numeration i.e. *col.* XIX/8–12: “Sarit(rah) went out / from the palace. / They seated her / in the chariot. / She set her face toward Babylon. / The lookouts went up / on the wall of / Babylon. / The lookouts / spoke up (and) said: / ‘The troop that / is coming / is too large to consist of emissaries, / too small to consist of warriors.’ / (Soon) Saritrah beckoned / from the portal. / ‘Who here / is this you?’ / ‘I am Saritrah, / the sister of / the Brothers.’”

These lines are part of a tale that recounts the outbreak and outcome of the fratricidal war between the king of Assyria Ashurbanipal and the king of Babylonia Shamash-shum-ukin (652–648 BC). In the poem, Ashurbanipal sent his brother to Babylonia to eat its bread and drink its wine and pay tribute, but he was lead astray by “the doctors who have made him arrogant” and decided that he was the greater king. In fact their father Esarhaddon chose to divide the succession, with Shamash-shum-ukin king of Babylon and Ashurbanipal king of Assyria. He hoped to satisfy the Babylonian elites while keeping Babylonia under Assyrian control, but Shamash-shum-ukin was the older of the two brothers, and when his younger brother became king of Assyria and demanded his total submission, tensions began to build. In the passage, Saritrah, the sister of both brothers, travels on behalf of Ashurbanipal from Nineveh to Babylon to reason with Shamash-shum-ukin. But before she enters the city, the guards on the Babylonian wall shout the same words as Tigranes. It seems obvious that Saritrah wasn’t travelling alone, but more astonishing is that the Babylonian lookouts and the Armenian king use almost the same phrase to comment the size of a group. The same goes for a general of Ashurbanipal, the Tartan (Akkadian *turtānu*, one of the half dozen most powerful offices in the Neo-Assyrian empire), who is later in the papyrus welcomed by the Babylonian wall guards with the same words as Saritrah was (*col. XXI.18–XXII.2*):

“The Tartan left the palace. / They seated him in the ch(ar)iot. / And he (set) his face (to Ba)bylon. / The watchman went up / To the wall of Babylon. / The wat(chman ans)wered and said: / ‘The force (that is) coming / Is too great for messengers, / Too small for the royal army.’”⁶

Ahead of an army, the general is ordered to bring Shamash-shum-ukin to Ashurbanipal (*col. XXI.15–18*). At first Shamash-shum-ukin refuses, but then he changes his mind and moves off to Nineveh, where he dies on the journey (*col. XXII.2–15*). However, the contemporary cuneiform sources tell us another story (*e.g. Rm Cyl. A, col. III.70–IV.109*): There we can read that the negotiations weren’t so successful and that the troops of Ashurbanipal after eighteen months of fighting besieged Babylon and captured it after another two years. Shamash-shum-ukin, on the other hand, perished in the conflagration at Babylon at the end of 648 BC.⁷ Therefore, what we have preserved in P. Amherst 63 is a literarily shaped tale of the Assyrian-Babylonian brother war viewed through an Egyptian lens of the fourth/third century BC.

The story about Tigranes and the story about Shamash-shum-ukin do not simply share similar words. In both an embassy tries to reason with a king. Saritrah aims to persuade Shamash-shum-ukin to end his rebellion. App. Claudius Pulcher asks Tigranes to hand over Mithridates. In both stories a general approaches to defeat the unreasonable king, the general of Ashurbanipal against Shamash-shum-ukin and Lucullus against Tigranes. Both accounts involve a siege of a city: on the one side Babylon, on the other side Tigranocerta. And in both the side which uttered “too many for an embassy, too few for an army” is defeated and the city falls to the ‘small army’. In our view, those similarities are best explained if we take a closer look at the classical tradition.

The first authors who mention this dictum of Tigranes are Memnon of Heraclea⁸ and Plutarch. Both describe the events of the Third Mithridatic War and the Roman invasion of Armenia (73–63 BC), but put different emphasis on the circumstances. Memnon tells us in his sixteenth book of his *Heracleian History*

⁶ See again for the text, notes and commentary: van der Toorn, *Papyrus* 228–236; and cf. the translation of Steiner/Nims, *The Aramaic Text* with their numeration *col. XX/18–XXI/2*: “The general went out / from the palace. / They seated him / in the chariot. / He set his face toward Babylon. / The lookouts went up / on the wall of Babylon. / The lookouts / spoke up (and) said: / ‘The troop that is coming / is too large to consist of emissaries, / too small to be the king’s army.’”

⁷ A full description of the events based on the different sources is offered by J. A. Brinkman, *Babylonia in the Shadow of Assyria (747–626 B.C.)*, *CAH* 3.2 (2006) 1–70, here 53–60; RIA s.v. Šamaš-šuma-ukin, and K. M. Streck, *Ashurbanipal und die letzten assyrischen Könige bis zum Untergange Niniveh’s. I. Teil: Einleitung, Das urkundliche Material, Chronologie und Geschichte* (Leipzig 1916) CCLXXXVIII–CCC; cf. R. C. Steiner and C. F. Nims, *Ashurbanipal and Shamash-shum-ukin: A Tale of Two Brothers from the Aramaic Text in Demotic Script*, *Revue Biblique* 92 (1985) 60–81, here 61–65. Many of the primary sources are edited and translated in J. Novotny and J. Jeffers, *The Royal Inscriptions of Ashurbanipal (668–631 BC), Assur-etal-ilani (630–627 BC), and Sin-sarra-iskun (626–612 BC), Kings of Assyria, Part I* (Winona Lake 2018).

⁸ Usually Memnon is dated within a range from the time of Julius Caesar to Hadrian; now on Memnon: D. Dueck, *Memnon of Herakleia on Rome and the Romans*, in T. Bekker-Nielsen (ed.), *Rome and the Black Sea Region: Domination, Romanisation and Resistance* (Aarhus 2006) 43–61.

that after the sieges of Heraclea and Sinope (FGrH 434 F 1, 32.1–37.9) the Roman forces under Lucullus started to besiege Tigranocerta (FGrH 434 F 1, 38.2). There the Romans won a first battle against a small Armenian troop of archers who, nonetheless, accomplished their task to bring the king’s concubines and his treasures out of the city (FGrH 434 F 1, 38.3). Having gathered a force of eighty thousand men Tigranes then comes as a relief to free the city from its besiegers. Next Memnon writes (FGrH 434 F 1, 38.4):

φθάσας δὲ καὶ ἰδὼν τὸ Ῥωμαίων ὀλίγον στρατόπεδον, ὑπεροπτικούς ἤφειε λόγους, ὡς ‘εἰ μὲν πρεσβευταὶ παρεῖεν, πολλοί’ φάμενος ‘συνῆλθον, εἰ δὲ πολέμιοι, παντελῶς ὀλίγοι’ καὶ ταῦτα εἰπὼν ἐστρατοπεδεύετο.

“Arriving first and seeing the small Roman army, he [*scil.* Tigranes] vented with disdainful words, saying that: ‘If they are here as ambassadors, they are many; if united as enemies, utterly few.’ Saying this he encamped.”

Lucullus, thereupon, wins the battle against Tigranes and resumes the siege of Tigranocerta, which was after a short time handed over to him (FGrH 434 F 1, 38.5f.). Aside of this direct speech of Tigranes we have only three other passages of direct speech from Memnon’s history: First, a retort of Chamaileon, a Heracleian envoy, to Seleukos Nikator (FGrH 434 F 1, 7.1); second, a quote from a letter of reply of Cornelius Scipio to a Heracleian embassy (FGrH 434 F 1, 18.8); and third, a scolding of M. Aurelius Cotta from C. Papirius Carbo during the hearing of a Heracleian embassy in the Roman Senate (cf. FGrH 434 F 1, 39.1–40.3). This low number of direct speeches is probably due to Photios epitomising Memnon’s history; we can assume that because this work *Peri Herakleias* consisted mostly of deeds and sayings of prominent figures of Heraclea (FGrH 434 T 1). Apart from Photios’ lack of interest in quotations, the four dicta reveal that Memnon had a habit to report sayings, which were closely related to the duties of ambassadors. This point corresponds to his manner of mentioning embassies throughout his history.⁹ So, we should not be surprised to find this saying of Tigranes in the work of Memnon who normally renounces narrative digressions and prefers a plain style (cf. FGrH 434 T 1).

Plutarch chooses a different way in his *Life of Lucullus*. He foreshadows the later role of Tigranes early in the biography, first briefly (*Luc.* 9.4) then with a full description in the mouth of Lucullus (*Luc.* 14.4–6): Not the Pontic king Mithridates but his son-in-law, the Armenian βασιλεὺς βασιλέων, will become Lucullus’ strongest and prime opponent in the *Life*. Plutarch introduces him upon the historical stage once Mithridates had escaped from Cabira into the kingdom of Armenia (*Luc.* 19.1). From there onwards, Tigranes starts waging war against the Romans: First, he refuses to hand over Mithridates to an embassy under App. Claudius Pulcher (*Luc.* 21) which provokes Lucullus to begin a war against Tigranes (*Luc.* 23.2). Then, some of his smaller units loose skirmishes. Subsequent he withdraws from Tigranocerta and encamps in the Taurus mountains in order to gather a large battle force (*Luc.* 25.3–6). There, his army is bolstered up by the kings of Media and Adiabene and by hosts of Gordyeni, Arabs, Albani and Iberes reaching a total of 20,000 bowmen and slingers, 55,000 horsemen of whom 17,000 were armoured, 150,000 heavy infantry soldiers and 35,000 workmen (*Luc.* 26.4, 26.6). Plutarch stresses the fact that the size of the army made Tigranes bold and boastful (*Luc.* 26.4f.). Moreover, he ignores advice and gives only ear to those who praise him (one of his main traits, cf. *Luc.* 25.1f., 27.5). The flattery continues until the battle of Tigranocerta: The kings, the courtiers, the generals and advisers around Tigranes were trying to outbid each other in their flattery at the expense of Lucullus (*Luc.* 27.3–4):

καὶ παρὰ τὸν ποταμὸν ἐν πεδίῳ μεγάλῳ καταστρατοπεδεύσας, παντάπασι μικρὸς ἐφάνη Τιγράνῃ, καὶ τοῖς κολακεύουσιν αὐτὸν διατριβὴν παρεῖχεν. οἱ μὲν γὰρ ἔσκωπτον, οἱ δ’ ὑπὲρ τῶν λαφύρων ἐν παιδιᾷ διεβάλλοντο κλῆρον, τῶν δὲ στρατηγῶν καὶ βασιλέων ἕκαστος ἠτείτο προσιῶν αὐτοῦ μόνου γενέσθαι τὸ ἔργον, ἐκείνον δὲ καθέζεσθαι θεατήν. βουλόμενος δὲ τι καὶ αὐτὸς ὁ Τιγράνης χαρίεις εἶναι καὶ σκωπτικός, εἶπε τὸ θρυλούμενον· ‘εἰ μὲν ὡς πρεσβευταί, πολλοὶ πάρισιν· εἰ δ’ ὡς στρατιῶται, ὀλίγοι.’ καὶ τότε μὲν οὕτως εἰρωνεύομενοι καὶ παίζοντες διετέλεσαν.

⁹ So at FGrH 434 F 1, 4.1, 6.2, 7.2, 9.2f., 10.2, 13.1, 15.2, 18.6–8, 25.1–26.2, 27.6, 29.6, 32.2, 34.3, 38.8, 40.3.

“When he [*scil.* Lucullus] had encamped along the river in a great plain, he appeared utterly insignificant to Tigranes, and supplied the king’s flatterers with ground for amusement. Some mocked at the Romans, and others, in pleasantry, cast lots for their spoil, while each of the generals and kings came forward and begged that the task of conquering them might be entrusted to himself alone, and that the king would sit by as a spectator. Then Tigranes, not wishing to be left behind entirely in this play of wit and scoffing, uttered that famous saying: ‘If they are come as ambassadors, they are too many; if as soldiers, too few.’ And so for the while they continued their sarcasm and jests.”

Plutarch’s depiction of the Roman war council stands in contrast to the Armenians’ behaviour; finding himself in a dangerous situation, Lucullus splits the army in two. His legate L. Licinius Murena, who was experienced in the matter of war against Mithridates, should continue the siege of the city with 6,000 men, while he would take 10,000 legionaries, the whole cavalry and 1,000 slingers to attack the enemy (*Luc.* 27.2). The Romans gained a brilliant victory, whereas Tigranes and some of his companions rode away early in the battle (*Luc.* 28.4f.). We see that Plutarch describes the atmosphere of the quote quite differently from Memnon, who is overly sober and puts the saying of Tigranes in a serious setting calling it contemptuous (FGrH 434 F 1, 38.4: ὑπεροπτικός). The Greek biographer, on the other hand, develops the aspect of flattering within the Armenian court whereby the Tigranic dictum represents the most famous in this play of wit (also Appian and Cassius Dio mention a witty tone, see below). Furthermore, Plutarch compares the attitudes of his main protagonists in chapter 27: Both are at the peak of their power, but only the Roman general isn’t blinded by the pride of his former victories. It is only later that Lucullus will experience military failure.

Many of these differences and emphases suit the sensibilities of Plutarch and Memnon, but some will come from their sources. Now, what Memnon has used for this part of his Heracleian history is a deeply controversial topic: Since Jacoby most see the main source in Domitius Callistratus (FGrH 433), but his dates are far from being clear.¹⁰ For the *Life of Lucullus* we are standing on a firmer ground. Plutarch quotes several authors himself: Sulla, Sallust, Cicero, Cornelius Nepos, Livy, Strabo and Antiochos of Ascalon.¹¹ He mentions also letters from Lucullus to the senate (*Luc.* 26.6, 35.5) and secret papers of the king (*Luc.* 22.4); but it is not likely that he knew those documents first-hand. The same goes for the grammarian Tyrannio (*Luc.* 19.7), Metrodorus of Scepsis (*Luc.* 22.2–4) and the rhetorician Amphicrates (*Luc.* 22.5); perhaps he glanced at Archias of Antioch, but that too is not easy to decide.¹² For the battle of Tigranocerta Plutarch cites three narrative authorities: the treatise *Peri Theon* of Antiochos of Ascalon, the *Historical Commentaries* of Strabo, and finally Livy (*Luc.* 28.7; cf. *Suda* λ, 688: s.v. Λούκουλλος). Possibly, the saying of Tigranes was included in one of them,¹³ or it was transmitted through another of the above-mentioned sources.

As we have seen, Memnon and Plutarch probably do not share a common source in their account of the battle of Tigranocerta. Even so, the key to understanding Tigranes’ wit can be found in Plutarch’s wording: he describes the quote as being famous (*Luc.* 27.4: εἶπε τὸ θρυλούμενον; in its passive form θρυλέω means ‘common talk’ or what is in every one’s mouth, cf. LSJ: s.v. θρυλέω II).¹⁴ But why was it famous? One

¹⁰ Cf. W. Ameling, Domitius Callistratus, FGrHist 433, *Hermes* 123 (1995) 373–376; see also Dueck, in *Rome* 49–50; furthermore Dueck, in *Rome* 53, suggests that Memnon also used Greek sources for the Roman history.

¹¹ On them see C. Pelling, *Rome in Crisis. Nine Lives by Plutarch* (London 2010) 112–114.

¹² On Tyrannio, Metrodorus and Amphicrates cf. Pelling, *Rome* 537 note 102, 538 notes 114 and 115; on Archias see, though with doubts, Pelling, *Rome* 114. Chahin, *The Kingdom* 201 assumes that the saying was an invention of Archias, who accompanied Lucullus in the Third Mithridatic War and who wrote a poem in honour of his exploits (cf. Cic. *Arch.* 11; 21).

¹³ A passage in the Periochae of Livy’s ninety-eighth book describes how Lucullus defeated the armies of Mithridates and Tigranes in many battles in Armenia (Perioch. 98.6: *L. Lucullus in Armenia Mithridatem et Tigranem et ingentes utriusque regis copias pluribus proeliis fudit*); the saying was probably included here.

¹⁴ In the *Suda*, too, the saying is called famous (λ, 688: s.v. Λούκουλλος): ὁ δὲ Τιγράνης ἀπιδὼν ἐς τὸ τῶν Ῥωμαίων καὶ λογισάμενος εὐαρίθμητον εἶναι, τοῦτο δὴ τὸ θρυλούμενον ἀπεφθέγγετο, ὡς ‘εἰ μὲν πρεσβευταί, πολλοὶ πάρεισιν, εἰ δὲ στρατιῶται, ὀλίγοι.’ = “Tigranes looking at the Romans and calculating that they are few in number, said this famous apophthegm: ‘they are many, if envoys, if soldiers, few.’”

could think that it is only an invention of Plutarch to balance a memorable saying of Lucullus at *Luc.* 27.7 with an equally famous quote of his antagonist Tigranes.¹⁵ That seems not likely because Cassius Dio informs us that he got the saying from a record (36.1b.2f. = Xiphil. p. 1.20–2.15 Din.):

ἐκ τούτου δὲ ὁ Τιγράνης ἀναθαρρήσας τσσαύτη χειρὶ στρατοῦ ἤλασεν ὥστε καὶ τῶν Ῥωμαίων τῶν ἐκεῖσε παρόντων καταγελάσαι· λέγεται δ’ οὖν εἰπεῖν (ὡς) εἰ μὲν πολεμήσοντες ἤκοιεν, ὀλίγοι, εἰ δὲ πρεσβεύσοντες, πολλοὶ παρεῖεν. οὐ μέντοι καὶ ἐπὶ πολὺ ἦσθη, ἀλλ’ εὐθὺς ἐξέμαθεν ὅσον ἢ τε ἀρετὴ καὶ ἢ τέχνη παντὸς ὁμίλου κρατεῖ.

“In consequence Tigranes recovered courage and marched forth with an army of such strength that he even scoffed at the Romans present there. He is said, indeed, to have remarked that when they came on a campaign there were only a few of them, but when on an embassy there were a great many. His amusement, however, was of short duration, for he forthwith discovered how far courage and skill surpass any mere numbers.”

Here, the signal word is λέγεται which refers to a literary tradition of the dictum.¹⁶ Similarly to the Plutarchean version, Cassius Dio calls the quote a witty remark (καταγελάω) and so does Appian at *Mithr.* 85.384 by using γελάω and ἐπισκώπτω.¹⁷ So, was the saying famous because it was part of a Greek (and Roman) literary tradition, which ascribes it to a jesting Tigranes? Partially: As above described, Tigranes and his followers were making a mock of the Romans prior to the battle. During their joking Tigranes described the Roman army as: “too many for an embassy, too few for an army.” However, the classical sources do not call this “a saying of Tigranes” but a saying or joke which Tigranes happens to utter. Someone familiar with eastern traditions must have known that this was an especially appropriate (or inappropriate) time for Tigranes to say such a thing, but it is not clear that the surviving Greek sources knew that the same phrase appeared in the story about the brothers’ war between Ashurbanipal and Shamash-shum-ukin. In the later classical tradition, the anecdote prior to the battle of Tigranocerta is memorable on its own. For the ultimate source we need to look very close to the battle for someone familiar with Near Eastern traditions who could speak or write fashionable Greek. On the whole, it is not hard to imagine that in a game of witticisms and clever remarks in the multicultural, multilingual environment of a Hellenistic court, Tigranes himself quoted a famous phrase.¹⁸

In addition, this passage is relevant to the long-running debate whether Greek literary culture should be seen as basically autonomous, or as part of a multilingual, multicultural Eastern Mediterranean world.¹⁹

¹⁵ Plut. *Luc.* 27.7 (cf. *Apophth. Reg.* 203A–B): Λευκόλλωφ δὲ μέλλοντι διαβαίνειν τὸν ποταμὸν ἔνιοι τῶν ἡγεμόνων παρήγουν φυλάττεσθαι τὴν ἡμέραν, μίαν οὖσαν τῶν ἀποφράδων ἃς μελαίνας καλοῦσιν· ἐν ἐκείνῃ γὰρ [τῇ ἡμέρᾳ] ἢ μετὰ Καιπίωνος ἀπόλετο στρατιὰ συμβαλοῦσα Κίμβροις. ὁ δ’ ἀπεκρίνατο τὴν μνημονευομένην φωνήν· ‘ἐγὼ γάρ’ ἔφη ‘καὶ ταύτην εὐτυχῆ ποιήσω Ῥωμαίοις τὴν ἡμέραν.’ ἦν δὲ (ἢ) πρὸ μιᾶς κωνῶν Ὀκτωβρίων. = “As Lucullus was about to cross the river, some of his officers advised him to beware of the day, which was one of the unlucky days – the Romans call them ‘black days’. For on that day Caepio and his army perished in a battle with the Cimbri. But Lucullus answered with these memorable words: ‘Verily, I will make this day, too, a lucky one for the Romans.’ Now the day was the sixth of October.”

¹⁶ On the use of λέγεται see B. L. Cook, Plutarch’s Use of λέγεται: Narrative Design and Source in Alexander, *GRBS* 42 (2001) 329–360.

¹⁷ App. *Mithr.* 85.384: ὁ δὲ γελάσας αὐτοῦ τὴν στρατηγίαν προῆει συνεσκευασμένος ἐς μάχην· καὶ τὴν Ῥωμαίων ὀλιγότητα ἰδὼν ἐπέσκωπεν οὕτως· ‘εἰ μὲν πρέσβεις εἰσὶν οἶδε, πολλοί, εἰ δὲ πολέμοι, πάμπαν ὀλίγοι.’ = “Tigranes derided such generalship and advanced ready for battle. When he saw how small the Roman force was, he said sarcastically: ‘If they are here as ambassadors, they are too many; if as enemies, altogether too few.’” Nonetheless, Appian’s account of the siege and battle of Tigranocerta is closer to Memnon by focusing on the military strategies and not like Plutarch on the moral aspects of the contenders (*Mithr.* 84.377–86.392; cf. M. Hose, *Erneuerung der Vergangenheit. Die Historiker im Imperium Romanum von Florus bis Cassius Dio* (Stuttgart–Leipzig 1994) 236–237). On the other hand, Cassius Dio’s short account may derive directly from Sallust like the detail of the usage of νόφθα during the siege (36.1b.1; Sall. *Hist.* fr. IV 61 M: *Naphthas, genus olei cedro simile*).

¹⁸ On irony and parody among the Hellenistic kings and in their courts see now: F. Muccioli, *Le orecchie lunghe di Alessandro Magno. Satira del potere nel mondo greco (IV–I secolo a.C.)* (Rome 2018).

¹⁹ Three recent overviews are S. Marchand, ‘What did the Greeks owe the Orient?’ The Question We Can’t Stop Asking (Even Though We Can’t Answer It), *Archaeological Dialogues* 17 (2010) 117–140; R. Rollinger, Old Battles, New Horizons:

Advocates of the later position often focus on parallels between cuneiform texts and Archaic Greek poetry, while their critics stress that parallels can occur for many reasons and that stories that early Greek thinkers travelled south or east are often highly questionable. Because of the shortage of surviving texts from likely zones of cultural exchange such as Lydia, Cyprus, and the Levant in the first millennium BC, and the difficulty of dating the different parts of the Hebrew Bible, it seems probable that this controversy will continue. However, the presence of a saying well known in the Greek literature of the Principate in an Aramaic papyrus 400 years earlier is certainly worth noting.

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