

Dvin 428 A.D.

Byron 
the Bard

This module is a short adventure for *Lex Arcana*. It has been designed as a diplomatic-investigative adventure for a group of moderately expert Custodes. This is a rule-light module focused on historical re-enactment and political plotting. Please refer to the handbook of *Lex Arcana*, either first or second edition, for rules and statistics.

OVERVIEW

The year is 428 AD. It is a time of crisis for the Roman Empire, especially in the East. While the Emperor THEODOSIUS II is leading the Roman Army against hordes of barbarians threatening the Danube borders, the brittle peace with the Parthian Empire is showing all its limits. The Parthian ruler, the King of Kings, VAHRAM V is eager to avenge their recent defeat in the Roman-Parthian wars of 421-422. Armenia, a country with old ties to Persia and recent connections with the Greek Church, has become a battleground for the influence of these two powerful neighbours. Since the last conflict, Rome has had the upper hand, and ARTASHES II has become the Armenian king with the aid of the Western power. However, since the winds of war started blowing, a daring plot has developed in the court of Dvin, the Armenian capital, to depose the current King and bring the country back into the Parthian sphere of influence.

In this dangerous and delicate context, the Custodes are dispatched to the court of Dvin to renew the alliance between the Roman Empire and Armenia. Here, they will find themselves plunged into the midst of dangerous schemes, in a court where a single wrong word may cost them their authority or their lives. They will soon realize that ARTASHES II is absent, that the hospitality of the regent may not be sincere, and that their contact with whom they were to meet is nowhere to be found. The Custodes will have one day and half to move around the court, explore the city, and dine with their hosts. This time is their only chance to discover that a coup is near completion. As members of the Cohors Auxiliaria Arcana, the players would be expected to stop the plot by uncovering the conspirators, forming a loyalist front, and releasing the king, thus furthering the interests of Rome. However, they may decide at any point that ARTASHES II is not worthy of his throne, and throw their support behind the current regent, thus contributing to a safer transition of power.

Alternative Ending. In the universe of *Lex Arcana*, the Custodes are expected to obey the orders of the Cohors Auxiliaria Arcana with utmost obedience and discipline. Thus, the main ending of this module sees the Custodes fighting for the cause of Artashes II and the interests of Rome. However, this does not have to be the necessary ending. The Narrator is invited to increase areas of moral

grayness as enjoyed by the group. By changing the reputation of Artashes II, the Narrator may confront the Custodes with the choice of whether they want to support a ruler who may be unfit for their role. By pushing his reputation to a negative extreme, the Custodes will be forced to choose whether they prefer to act in the interest of the people of Dvin or the pursue the schemes of Rome.

SETUP

Whereas the standard setting of *Lex Arcana* is an alternative and dark Roman Empire that has survived its fall, this module is set in the actual historical context of 428 A.D. Characters, locations and events depicted in the story are mostly historical. However, the game is going to differ from actual historical fact at least in two significant ways. First, the Cohors Auxiliaria Arcana is imagined to be a real, although secretive, arm of the Roman government tasked with dealing with supernatural events. Second, and most importantly, from the start of the narration events are not expected to follow necessarily their historical outcomes.

The adventure can be played either with existing characters or pregenerated characters, such as the ones provided at the end of the *Lex Arcana QuickStarter*¹. In both cases, it is recommended to create or enrich the background of the characters with ties to the Eastern Empire. Knowledge of the politics and the languages of Armenia, Persia and the Middle East would be extremely useful for the players to find their way through the streets and at the court of Dvin.

BACKGROUND

This section provides the Narrator with key events that happened in and around the Kingdom of Armenia in the years preceding this module. In 428, the historic kingdom of Armenia is a formally independent country, ruled by ARTASHES IV of the Arsacid dynasty. However, the two major powers in the region bitterly vie for influence and control over this land. On one side, the Eastern Roman Empire, known informally as the *Greeks*, has in the past affirmed its military superiority and has strong religious ties with the Christian hierarchy in Armenia; recently, however, problems on the

¹<https://www.drivethrurpg.com/product/253285/Lex-Arcana-RPG--QuickStarter>

European front have shifted the attention of the emperor THEODOSIUS II from this region. On the other hand, the Parthian Empire sees this area as part of its own sphere of influence for geographic and dynastical reasons; indeed, the Arsacid family has Parthian origins, and the current King of Kings VAHRAM V of the Sasanian family aims to reestablish Parthian control.

The following collection of events does not provide a complete picture of the situation in Armenia in the fifth century, but instead is primarily meant to describe events that may affect the setting of the adventure, or which could be the topic of debate among players and NPCs.

Naming convention. As a general rule, all royal names (Theodosius II, Artashes IV, Vahram V) will be referenced after their first appearance without their numeral (Theodosius, Artashes, Vahram). Also, Armenian characters in Dvin will be presented with their full name at first (Veh Mihr Shapur, Zarmir Hetuman), but will subsequently be referenced by their family name (Shapur, Hetuman). A list of all important characters is provided in the appendix.

Conversion to Christianity (301). The Kingdom of Armenia was the first country ever to adopt Christianity as an official religion in 301. At the beginning of the fourth century, the court of TIRIDATES III was converted by SAINT GREGORY THE ILLUMINATOR. This marked the beginning of the Armenian Apostolic Church, a church that has preserved its hierarchy and independence since. The church is headed by a figure named the *Catholicos*, who played a relevant role in several doctrinal disputes that inflamed the Empire in the following century. Despite temporary divergences on matters of faith, and tensions between Armenian and Greek clergy, the Empire has frequently stood as a defender of the religious autonomy of Armenia against attempts to revive the old Zoroastrian faith from Parthia.

Foundation of Dvin (335). Dvin, the capital of the Kingdom of Armenia, is a recently-built and burgeoning city. In 335, the Armenian ruler KHOSROV III KOTAK decided to move the capital from the historic city of Artaxata to a small settlement north of it. Although at the time of play less than a century has passed since its foundation, the city is already a lively place, hosting a population of almost 100.000 inhabitants, merchants, artists and traders. This makes Dvin a city of considerable size, comparable to important imperial centers like Antioch or Smyrne - although still smaller than the metropolis of Alexandria and Rome. Custodes who are not aware of the development of Dvin may be very impressed by the size of the city and the wealth of its markets and crafts;

even if standing outside the borders of the Roman world, this place looks as refined and rich as the most important provincial capitals of the Empire, far from the image of remote barbaric villages that may have been present in some of the Custodes' minds.

The Creation of the Armenian Alphabet (405). In an effort to preserve its identity, torn as it is between the Greek and the Parthian influence, a new script for the Armenian language is developed by MESROP MASHTOTS, a scholar and member of the Armenian Apostolic Church. Although the spoken language itself is unchanged, Custodes who are not aware of this recent development may find it impossible to read messages written using this new alphabet.

Roman-Parthian War (421-422). Religious tensions between the Roman Empire and the Parthian Empire came to a head in 421. After VAHRAM decided to persecute Christians who had been hostile towards Zoroastrians, THEODOSIUS declared war in order to protect their fellow correligionars. After some military victories for the Greeks, a peace treaty was signed that committed both parties to a policy of religious tolerance. The agreement also reiterated the independence of Armenia under the new rule of ARTASHES, and confirmed the old legislation allowing Greek merchants the right to travel only until Artaxata - journeying beyond this city was punished with a fine and with permanent exile; this was an old rule originally agreed by previous emperors to assure the Parthian king that the safety of the Persian heartland would not be compromised. However, despite this last limiting piece of legislation, the success of the military campaign of 422 had increased the influence of the Roman Empire in Armenia to a point that VAHRAM finds now unbearable.

Artashes on the Armenian Throne (422-428). As the Roman-Parthian war drew to an end, the rule over Armenia was officially transferred from a council of *nakharar* (local nobles) into the legitimate hands of ARTASHES of the Arsacid family.

In the year 428, the grip of Artashes on power has become extremely weak. Although he can still count on the support of the *Catholicos* SAHAK and a few loyal officers like General VARDAN MAMIKON and the leader of the Royal Guard ZARMIR HETUMAN, a large coterie of *nakharar* led by VEH MIHR SHAPUR has decided that the time has come to dethrone the king and welcome into Dvin the troops of VAHRAM.

The Coup (428). A few days before the arrival of the Custodes in Dvin, SHAPUR has finally obtained the official support of the Parthian King

of Kings VAHRAM to proceed with his plan. Taking advantage of the absence of MAMIKON, and counting on his network of *nakharar*, SHAPUR had the king secretly arrested in the Royal Palace by ARTZRUNI on Thursday night. An official rumor was then spread, that the King has left to confer urgently with general MAMIKON in Artaxata, potentially about the arrival of Greek ambassadors. In truth, SHAPUR has the King imprisoned in an old tower along the city walls, and has promoted himself to the status of official regent. Now, for SHAPUR it is just a matter of time, until the arrival of a Parthian contingent, to which he will deliver ARTASHES in exchange for the crown and official recognition by the Parthian King of Kings.

The unexpected arrival of the Custodes could potentially complicate SHAPUR's plans. Yet he intends to take advantage of the situation to sanction his authority in the eyes of doubtful *nakharar* and potential enemies like HETUMIAN. If the Roman embassy were to treat with him as they would treat the King, this would implicitly bestow on him the same authority he is expecting to get with the Parthian support.

Timeline. A basic timeline listing the main events before and during the module is provided in appendix.

STORY HOOKS

In 428, tensions are high not only in Armenia, but along the whole Eastern border with Parthia. Custodes who are deployed in the Eastern provinces are aware that the winds of war are stirring. To make the situation worse, the Emperor THEODOSIUS is already waging war in the West, making a military intervention against Parthia more complicated. Very likely VAHRAM is aware of this difficulty and will try to take advantage of it in the coming months.

To try to prevent war, the Emperor has decided to act on two levels. On the political level, an official delegation led by FLAVIUS DYONISUS will meet with VAHRAM and his court in Ctesiphon to discuss the current situation and renew the old treaties. On an unofficial level, a group of Custodes is to be dispatched to Dvin with the task of assessing the situation and collecting any information useful to the Empire and to the Cohors Auxiliaria Arcana. As it will be explained to them by FLAVIUS DYONISUS, the players have been chosen for this delicate and risky mission.

INTRODUCTION: THE JOURNEY TO DVIN

Flashback structure. The adventure in this module takes place in Dvin, and, as such, it starts *in media res*. The Narrator is suggested to start the story by describing the arrival of the Custodes at the gates of Dvin after a week of journeying from Antioch. After setting the scene, the Narrator can then take the Custodes through a flashback to the tent of Flavius Dyonisus where they received their orders. If the Narrator wants to play out the journey from Antioch to Dvin, introducing additional events, it is recommended to avoid the flashback structure, and play the scene in the tent before the journey to Dvin.

A long and tiring journey has taken the Custodes to Dvin:

It is the early afternoon of a Saturday in early May, and after an extenuating journey you and your guide are finally approaching Dvin. Your journey took more than a week: you started in the provincial capital of Antioch, headed east towards Hierapolis, skirted Edessa passing by the ill-omened fields of Carrahae, entered the mountainous lands of Armenia, stopped in Tigranocerta, joined in Artaxata with the caravans of merchants coming from Cappadocia, and, at last reached the hill over which stands the grand walls of Dvin.

It is important to stress that this journey must have been especially tiring. A need for speed and privacy has led the Custodes to follow secondary

roads across southern Armenia, instead of heading north and joining the more frequented routes across Cappadocia and Pontus. This has forced them to travel through rough and mountainous land that has put a strain on them and their mounts.

Events on the road. Travelling secondary roads provides a good setting for random encounters and events. The Narrator is suggested to introduce scenes that may be related to the ensuing story or that tie in with a wider campaign. Players may also be invited to describe what their character may have experienced during the journey. If the Narrator is following the flashback structure, players at this point may still be unaware of their objective; encourage them to think about the journey in itself, independently from their future aim in Dvin.

The first view of the city provides a glad sight to the travelling party:

As you climb the last summit between you and the city, Dvin appears at the horizon, nestled upon a steep hill. From this distance you can clearly distinguish the strong walls dotted with fortified towers, the Citadel standing above the sprawling city, the pinnacle of the Cathedral in the west of the city. Houses are built on all the sides of the hill. The clamor of the thousands of inhabitants of the city seems to reach you even at this distance. Your guide smiles: at last, you have arrived.

FLASHBACK: IN THE TENT OF FLAVIUS DYONISUS

The scene takes place between seven and ten days before the arrival of the Custodes in Dvin. The players have been summoned to Antioch, a preeminent city in the Eastern Roman Empire, and also the seat of one of the chapters of the Cohors Arcana Auxiliaria. The Custodes are supposed to have just arrived in Antioch (after receiving a notice no more than a week earlier) or to have already been deployed in the area for a previous task.

One night a week ago, you have all been lead to what looks like a small military encampment on the western side of Antioch. A soldier has escorted you through the gates, and then, following the main straight route, he has taken you to the center of the encampment. A large tent for the main officer stood there, but instead of letting you inside, the soldier has taken you to the back. Sitting on a curule seat, his face half hidden in the dark, a weary officer greets you with a slow movement of his hand.

The figure in front of the players is FLAVIUS DYONISUS, a renowned officer from Thracia and an important member of the Cohors. Wrapped in darkness, he wears a light *lorica plumata* - even though he is resting in the middle of the encampment. His outlook appears at the same time weathered and martial. Custodes who had the opportunity of seeing him in action a few years ago can not fail to notice how much older he looks now.

FLAVIUS DYONISUS has been recently chosen as *Magister utriusque militiae per Orientem*, the supreme military commander of the army on the Eastern front. Here, his authority is second only to the Emperor himself. FLAVIUS DYONISUS is a loyal and ponderate character, a veteran who has learned the art of war by taking part in more campaigns than he can remember. However, his election to the highest post of command in the Empire has thrown him into a new environment: the political world of plots and betrayals of the Imperial Court. Despite his experience in war, the tensions and the dangers of this reality have taken a serious toll on his health and mental peace, to the point that he recently suffered a seizure that paralyzed half of his face. Tonight, he has chosen his position carefully, so that the shadows can hide his paralysis; he will avoid moving from where he sits, unless necessary.

The Roman Imperial Court. The court of the Eastern Roman Empire in Constantinople is an infamous cradle of conspiracy and betrayal. Around the figure of the Emperor, Theodosius, gather many figures scheming for influence

and power. Women related to the Emperor such as Galla Placidia (mother), Pulcheria (sister), or Eudocia (wife), clergymen like Nestorius or Hypathius, generals like Aetius or Bonifacius, envoys from the Western Empire and the barbarian territories, and an infinite number of courtesans constantly plot against each other, often violently, to assert their authority and gain the ear of the Emperor. For the uninitiated, the Court is a dangerous place where any action can easily be misinterpreted and be the end of one's career, or even life.

The tasks. Once the accompanying soldier has been dismissed, FLAVIUS DYONISUS will start talking in a deep and grave voice. His sentences are short and curt, almost betraying a measure of resignation.

"The Emperor has requested the service of the Cohors Auxiliaria Arcana. Once again, it is our duty... Our duty to defend the borders of the Empire."

Before proceeding, FLAVIUS DYONISUS will explain why the Custodes have been chosen, possibly underlining how their expertise would be of use during the coming assignment in Armenia. As a Narrator, take this opportunity to have FLAVIUS DYONISUS provide information on Armenia and the political context that would be known to the Custodes, but not to the players. This may include reminding the players about the place of Armenia between the Empire and Parthia, naming the rulers of these countries, and recalling some of the events in the Background section that the Custodes would be aware of.

The Custodes have been chosen as special envoys of the Emperor to the court of Dvin. They are meant to be the direct representatives of THEODOSIUS, and this is at the same time a great honour and a great danger. Three tasks are to be assigned to them:

- Their official mission is to deliver to the Armenian ruler ARTASHES gifts from the Empire and an autograph letter of the Emperor himself. The gifts consist of a silver scepter manufactured in Britain and a small crate containing several scrolls with New Testament translations in Greek; the letter is a reiteration of the friendship and the commitment of the Empire to the independence of Armenia.
- At the same time, their unofficial task is to collect information about the state of the kingdom - rumors of a possible alliance with the Kingdom of Parthia are worrisome for the security of the Empire and they need to be verified.
- Last, for the Cohors Auxiliaria Arcana itself, the Custodes are requested to collect from the *Catholicos* a set of reports about strange

creatures recently sighted in Colchis. The *Catholicos* had already agreed to deliver such documents to the emissaries from the Emperor, so obtaining them should be quite easy.

FLAVIUS DYONISUS will remark to the Custodes that these tasks, even if they may look trivial, involve great risks.

"You are called to be representatives of the Emperor in a foreign land. This is no small task. You need to always behave in a way that is advantageous to the Empire. Listen, understand, and follow the forms. But never be servile only for the sake of pleasing our allies. First and foremost, your actions should uphold the honor of the Emperor."

As the Custodes will soon discover, the subtleties of the etiquette are manifold. Even the simple exchange of gifts will require them to follow a protocol that has many potential pitfalls. Concerning the presents, the very choice made at Constantinople will not help the Custodes; indeed the gifts themselves may be the cause of misunderstanding with their subtle meanings: the silver sceptre may hint at the subordination of Armenia to the Empire which dresses itself in royal gold; copies of the New Testament may be seen as challenge to the delicate equilibrium between Christianity and Zoroastrianism. Similarly, inquiring about the state of the country and its relation with Parthia requires a certain tact: overt questions may identify the Custodes as spies. Finally, collecting the reports from the *Catholicos* requires the usual discretion needed to preserve the secrecy of the operations of the Cohors Auxiliaria Arcana.

The guide. On the other hand, FLAVIUS DYONISUS will offer to the Custodes a guide who will lead them through the internal roads of Syria and Armenia in order to approach Dvin from the South. Although not the most common route, this itinerary is the most direct and the fastest way for a small group. FLAVIUS DYONISUS will explain that he has three individuals at his service that may act as a guide:

- LAZARUS OF ARTAXATA: a Christian monk coming from the old Armenian capital who spent the many years in Constantinople and Edessa.
- PAHLAV RSHTUNI: a *nakharar*, member of the Armenian aristocracy, who left Dvin more than a decade ago.
- ARISTARCUS PONTINUS: a Greek-speaking merchant from the region of Pontus who has been travelling for many years between the Empire and Armenia.

FLAVIUS DYONISUS does not know these individuals personally, but he is ready to guarantee their loyalty. He will require the

Custodes to pick one of them as their guide, based on the few details provided. If the Custodes ask for time to decide, or they ask for an interview with the candidates, FLAVIUS DYONISUS will remark on the urgency of the matter, and will insist on an immediate decision.

The Narrator is invited to let the Custodes consult among themselves about the choice. It should be clear that three candidates are very different, and each one comes with a background that may be of help to the players in different situations. As a bottom line, the Custodes should be able to recognize that each one has connections and familiarity with different environments (ecclesiastical, aristocratic and commercial, respectively).

The contact. Last, FLAVIUS DYONISUS will also tell the Custodes that the Cohors Auxiliaria Arcana has a trusted informer in Dvin: GAIUS NASUS, living in Dvin under the identity of a merchant named GOLON. GOLON is of Armenian descent and he has been living in Dvin for many years, so he can provide enormous support to the players. As soon as the Greek envoys will arrive in city, GOLON will keep an eye on the Citadel. If a purple cloth is hung from one of the windows of the guest wing, he will take it as a sign that the Custodes want to meet him. In that case, he will organize to get in touch with them in a safe place in town. GOLON can be a source of information, as well as a helping hand to escape if things were to go the wrong way. FLAVIUS DYONISUS will warn the Custodes that they are expected to act with circumspection to avoid exposing GOLON.

The farewell. Once their mission is clear and a guide has been chosen, a tired FLAVIUS DYONISUS will explain that all the preparations for the departure will be completed by the following late morning. Until then, the Custodes will be free to rest at the encampment and collect whatever they deem necessary for their journey.

When all the questions are over, the general will stare into the eyes of each of the Custodes. This is the moment in which FLAVIUS DYONISUS will voluntarily reveal his paralyzed face by turning towards the Custodes. He will then dispense the Custodes with a final admonition.

"Be cautious and vigilant. I myself will travel to Ctesiphon in the following days to meet with the King of Kings Vahram in lieu of the Emperor. The Empire is in need of everything the Cohors Auxiliaria Arcana can provide."

This last admonition is meant to have the ring of a confession. Players who try to get an insight on FLAVIUS DYONISUS and succeed in a *Sensibilitas* roll may get the feeling that his farewell has a disheartened sound. Indeed,

FLAVIUS DYONISUS believes that the tasks assigned by the Emperor to himself and to the Custodes are not only hopeless, but nearly suicidal. Walking into Parthian territory with what are certainly empty promises, if not lies, is a dangerous mission; despite their theoretical diplomatic immunity, if he or the Custodes were to be accused of being spies - and fabricating evidence in this sense would not be hard - their fate would be sealed. He even wonders if this task had fallen on him because of the manouvers of some courtesan, jealous of his military successes, maybe the Emperor himself.

If pressed on these points, FLAVIUS DYONISUS may explain at more length his own mission (meeting and discussing possible agreements with VAHRAM) and sympathize about the dangers that they will all share in a foreign court in a

position of weakness. However, he will never voice his suspicions on the Emperor or even the fear that the whole mission may have been organized as an elaborate plot to kill them off. After all FLAVIUS DYONISUS is still a general of the Empire, and he does not want to cause more panic than necessary.

Back to Dvin. At the end of the meeting with Flavius Dyonisus the Custodes should have a good idea of their assignment, although the actual challenges involved should feel vague and indefinite. The tasks given to them may seem trivial, but their encounter with the general should have raised the awareness that they are about to step into the unfamiliar and dangerous environment of a court where they will be alone and where every action could be compromising, and potentially their last. With this feeling, let the flashback end and bring the players back in front of the gates of Dvin.

SCENE: ENTERING DVIN

Having taken in the sight of the capital of Armenia, your guide sighs with nostalgia, whispering: "Home." Then, looking in the direction of the gates, you notice a small group of horsemen carrying flags and standards heading your way. "The King is welcoming us. I recommend you to prepare for the meeting" - explains your guide.

Although small, the convoy of Custodes has not passed unobserved through the countryside surrounding Artaxata and Dvin, and a notice has been relayed in the capital. A small group of horsemen in ceremonial gear is now moving towards the Custodes to welcome them.

Before the encounter, allow some time for the players to interact with their guide. This is a good opportunity for discussing the protocols at court. LAZARUS OF ARTAXATA and ARISTARCUS PONTINUS have a basic knowledge of the etiquette: they will remind the players of the necessity of addressing ARTASHES with his correct title of *King*; they will stress the importance of being polite but not subservient, to honor the host but not to humble themselves as representatives of the Emperor; finally, they will mention the need to respect the hierarchy and appreciate the gift of hospitality. PAHLAV RSHTUNI, as an aristocratic, has a deeper knowledge of the protocol, and he may teach to the Custodes the proper gestures and the Armenian formulas to use at court; this will grant a +d4 on *Auctoritas* rolls during the upcoming meeting.

Armenian language. Armenian language is the official language in Dvin, and a symbol of pride to Armenian culture. Speaking the tongue is an immediate way to get the sympathy of any Armenian. Although the language is ancient, an original writing system for Armenian was introduced only in 405 by the theologian Mesrop Mashtots, thus becoming the official ecclesiastical alphabet and then the national script. All the guides can fluently speak Armenian, as well as read Armenian if written using the Greek script. Only Aristarcus Pontinus had the opportunity to learn the new alphabet, and he can help the Custodes in deciphering messages written with this script. Both Lazarus of Artaxata and Pahlav Rshtuni left Armenia too early to learn the new written form of Armenian.

An Omen. At this point one of the Custodes may notice an eagle taking off from one of the towers of Dvin, flying over the Armenian guard moving towards the characters, and finally bending to the right and disappearing into the Western sky. An augur, or any character with knowledge about divination, will recognize in this flight an omen. A successful roll on *De Magia* or *Sensibilitas* will reveal a bad omen; a marginal success will recognize in the rightward direction of the flight a negative sign; a complete success

will identify the eagle with the Roman Empire, abandoning the Kingdom of Armenia behind.

Encountering the Armenian Guard. In the meantime, the royal Armenian Guards will have galloped forward towards the characters. At the head rides an officer wearing a ceremonial hauberk with a silver pattern and a thick dark red wool cloak; he is a middle-aged man, with short and well-trimmed brown hair and beard, and deep lines etched in his face from the many days he has spent on military campaigns. As the group of horsemen approaches the Custodes, they will slow down, and their leader will introduce himself and extend an invitation to the Custodes:

"The great king of Armenia, Artashes, welcomes the delegates of the divine Greek Emperor! My name is Zarmir Hetumian, head of the Royal Guard, and it is my honor to invite you to be guests of my king."

HETUMIAN is very respectful and speaks good Greek. Although he is not sure that the newcomers are indeed delegates of the Emperor, he assumes so to avoid a potentially disrespectful address. He would expect the characters to behave in a similar way. If the characters present themselves and deliver the greetings of the Emperor they can make a good first impression on HETUMIAN, even more if they were to do so by speaking in Armenian.

HETUMIAN's unit is formed by ten other cataphracts - horsemen usually wearing heavy armours, although, for the occasion, they are all sporting dark red ceremonial clothes. These soldiers are all of noble origin, and they are highly disciplined.

After a brief exchange, HETUMIAN will ask the Custodes to follow him through the city and to the Palace. If he is pleased with them, he will have them ride side by side with him, otherwise he will be at the head of the group, with the players behind him, and then the rest of his horsemen.

Riding towards the Citadel. Led by HETUMIAN, the Custodes will ride through the main avenues and arteries of the city, passing by the Cathedral and through a couple of bustling markets. Locals will move by side at the passage of the Royal Guard, and look with interest at the newcomers. If the Custodes are riding side by side with HETUMIAN, this will not pass unnoticed to the populace, which will automatically assume that the visitors must be respectable and trusted.

During their ride, the Custodes will have their first sight of the great city of Dvin. The town looks prosperous and loud, a jewel up in the high mountains of Caucasus. The market is full

of Western and Eastern products, and many different languages can be heard mixing in a single cacophony. The Cathedral stands tall, proud like the great churches of Constantinople, surrounded by the Palace of the *Catholicos* and other stone buildings. In the highest point, the Palace, where HETUMIAN is leading, shines within the large and solid Citadel (see map in the appendix).

While riding, HETUMIAN will ask courteous questions about the Emperor and the journey undertaken by the Custodes. He may also satisfy any curiosity the characters may have about the city or Armenia. However, he will not discuss any matter that has political implications. Although he is currently obeying the orders of the regent, he is strongly loyal to the true king, ARTASHES. He is concerned about the current state of the court, but, at this point, he will hardly have enough trust to make the Custodes part of what is going on in the court.

In the Royal Palace (area A). As the group approaches the Palace, the number of civilians decreases, while the number of soldiers patrolling the streets and the walls of the Citadel increases. The quantity of guards seems particularly high, and although the characters may interpret it just as a display of might, an exceptional success in *Ingenium* will pick up subtle cues, such as the location of certain

soldiers and their task, hinting at the fact that the soldiers seem to be too many just to protect the Citadel.

Once beyond the gates of the Citadel, the horses of the Royal Guards and of the characters will be taken to the stable. On foot, HETUMIAN will lead the Custodes through a small square and a colonnaded walk busy with more guards and noblemen, up to the doors of the Royal Palace. After exchanging a military salute with the other Royal Guards at the door, HETUMIAN will finally leave the characters in a small antechamber before the Throne Room. In a few moments, the King will receive them.

Royal Guard and Armenian Army. The Royal Guard is a military elite group formed by *nakharar*. Thanks to their means, they can afford heavy armors, and on the battlefield they fight as cataphracts. About thirty Royal Guards reside in the Palace; their leader, Hetuman takes orders directly from the King. They have a strong esprit de corps, strict discipline and unwavering loyalty to the King. Indeed, Hetumian has mixed feelings towards the official regent, Shapur, whom he obeys out of respect for authority. The heavy armament and the dark red suits distinguish the Royal Guard from the common soldiers of the Armenian Army. The latter are less well-trained, but way more numerous. In the absence of General Mamikon, Mjej Artzruni has a strong influence on the soldiers of the Armenian Army and is considered by many to be the commander in charge.

SCENE: RECEPTION WITH THE REGENT

Left on their own in the waiting room, the Custodes may talk with their guide to receive some feedback on how they interacted with HETUMIAN. This may be exploited by the Narrator to point out clear violations of the etiquette which should not happen in the meeting with the King. LAZARUS OF ARTAXATA may also comment on the fact that the Cathedral looked awfully quiet for this time of the day, and that he was surprised to not hear the bells ringing.

Meeting with the regent. When the exchange between the players and their guide is over, the doors of the Throne Room will be opened from the inside by two soldiers of the Royal Guard and the Custodes invited inside. A bright room opens in front of them. A dark green carpet leads from the doors towards the raised platform where the throne stands. On their left and right, a series of circular columns covered with royal Armenian standards restricts the view of the sides of the room.

It will take just a few steps for the Custodes to realize that the robust wooden throne on the platform at the other end of the room is empty. No trace of the king is visible. The Narrator should protract this scene for a few moment; the players should realize that this is an absolutely unexpected event and they should feel disoriented, if not afraid; after all, they should have learned from FLAVIUS DYONISUS that the situation in Dvin has been extremely unstable.

After a moment of heightened tension, someone finally arrives to greet the visitors:

The sounds of footsteps approaching from your right reaches you. Whoever is coming is still hidden by the column. Finally, some figures appear from the shadows. The leading one is a middle-aged man, partly bald, with a small black beard. He wears rich dark green garments, and after stepping up and down the throne platform he heads smiling towards you. Behind him, two other richly clothed figures follow closely moving around the throne platform. After the trio, a number of courtesans and aristocrats enter the room from the same direction.

The man moving confidently towards the Custodes is SHAPUR, a powerful and ambitious *nakharar*. Right behind him follow two other *nakharar*.

The first is MJEJ ARTZRUNI, a young officer who sees in the rise of SHAPUR his best opportunity to quickly rise to the higher ranks of the army. Enlived with the passion and impetuosity of youth, ARTZRUNI is determined to assert himself; he has limited diplomatic tact

and may act in a despising or even aggressive way towards those who could hinder him. Multiple times SHAPUR has had to intervene to prevent his alliances with other *nakharar* from being compromised by ARTZRUNI's rude opinions. Despite this, SHAPUR sees the respect and the influence held by ARTZRUNI over the soldiers as crucial to establishing his power, especially in the absence of the General MAMIKON. The two men are thus connected by strong mutual interests.

The second figure is CHIHOR MOKAT, an older politician well-versed in the relationships and plots inside the court. A pragmatist, MOKAT sees the shift of Armenia towards the sphere of influence of Parthia as a necessity, and for this reason he has decided to back SHAPUR. He tends to work in the shadows, forming webs of alliances among *nakharar*, which he hopes, at the end of the day, would lead his party to power. His allegiance to SHAPUR is purely contingent. He sees him as the person in the best position to carry over the transition of Armenia from the orbit of the Roman Empire to Parthia.

Although the three men have little sympathy for the Roman Empire, diplomatic etiquette and the widely-shared principle of hospitality require them to treat the Custodes courteously. Actually, on instigation of MOKAT, they have decided that the Greek embassy could be exploited to reinforce the position of SHAPUR; if the representatives of the Greek Emperor were to deal with SHAPUR in front of the assembled court as they would deal with the King, this would consolidate SHAPUR's power and make the forthcoming transition of power smoother. For this reason the three representative are going to adopt a friendly tone, and try to elicit from the Custodes responses and behaviors fit for a king.

Diplomatic tension. The Narrator should try to convey the idea that every word and conversations with Shapur has its own weight and that every statement or action comes with subtle insinuations and implications. Ideally, players should develop an over-analytical mindset where each minutiae may hold a profound meaning; for instance, the fact that, while entering, only Shapur stepped onto the royal platform is an implicit way for Shapur to state his authority.

Discussing with the regent. Stepping in front of his two counselors and the assembled court, SHAPUR will take the first word:

With a large smile and a small quick bow, the leading figure addresses you: "Welcome to the court of Dvin! Armenia always opens its arms to trusted friends coming to visit." As he stops speaking, everyone in the room falls silent.

SHAPUR will offer a warm welcome, but notice that he will avoid introducing himself. Doing so

is a break of the standard etiquette; his reason for this is that he hopes the Custodes will address him as if he were the King. If the players conspicuously bow, address him with royal titles, or deliver the Emperor's greetings and gifts to him, SHAPUR will act very delighted. Only after this ceremonial has taken place, or if the Custodes manage to avoid the diplomatic trap, will SHAPUR introduce himself as the current regent of Dvin in place of the King ARTASHES.

The absence of the King may surprise the Custodes, and if they look confused, SHAPUR will offer to them the false explanation he has already spread around the court: the King is in Artaxata to meet with his general MAMIKON. Seeing through the lies of the seasoned courtiers is an extremely challenging task. An exceptional success in *De Societate* may raise some suspicions, but even the realization that SHAPUR may not be honest about the whereabouts of the King could be of little benefit; Custodes should be aware that the actual location or business of the King may be a matter kept secret for obvious safety reason.

The explanation of SHAPUR about the absence of the King will be immediately followed by an invitation to stay at the Palace as *his* guests until the following night. According to the etiquette, such an invitation is not something that can be lightly refused. The aim of SHAPUR is both to make a display of royal hospitality and to keep potential troublemakers under control. Custodes need to present a very good reason to turn down the invitation and not offend SHAPUR.

Beyond these formalities, SHAPUR will also exchange pleasantries with the guests, such as asking about their journey and about the health of the Emperor. SHAPUR will always hold the conversation, while the surrounding courtiers will mostly nod at his remarks. A complete success on an *Ingenium* roll is necessary to spot a current of uneasiness among some of the members of the crowd. However, SHAPUR may take it negatively if he sees the Custodes being distracted looking around, or if they were to address someone else in the room.

Last, SHAPUR will invite the Custodes to the dinner banquet *he* has prepared for them. Again, this is a sort of invitation that is hard to turn down. Acceptance is meant to reinforce the status of both the Custodes and SHAPUR.

SHAPUR may also answer simple questions coming from the Custodes. However, this sort of reception is not meant as an occasion for the players to ask generic questions, discuss politics, or interrogate SHAPUR. The regent will patiently reply to a couple of such questions, but he may soon cut them short, explaining that important

matters of court require his attention. If at any time the Custodes were to offer him the gifts they have carried, SHAPUR will act very honored, thanking the emissaries and looking around the room, as if to have this act widely acknowledged. However, he will insist that the exchange of gifts will take place during the night banquet.

The Parthian conspiracy. Shapur is now at the head of a conspiracy to overturn the Roman-backed King Artashes and establish his own rulership. Shapur has strong Parthian sympathies, and he has won the support of the Parthian King of Kings Vahram who is eager to see the old historical region of Armenia back in the orbit of his country. Shapur enjoys the support of many *nakharar* dissatisfied with the rule of Artashes, first among them the cunning Mokat and the martial Artzruni. However, his backers among the Army are less forthcoming: despite the charisma of Artzruni, the first marshal Mamikon and the head of the Royal Guard Hetumian do not trust him completely. Shapur is then waiting for the arrival of a Parthian column on Sunday night, after which he will feel safe in carrying out his coup.

SCENE: ARMENIAN HOSPITALITY

At the end of the dialogue, SHAPUR and the entire court will leave:

“Be now my guests. Take your rest until tonight’s celebrations. This Palace is your home, and maybe for a moment you will forget that the sky above you is Dvin’s and not Constantinople’s.”

Even his final words lack humbleness, and in comparing Dvin and Constantinople he is again trying to restate his authority. After this, a servant, HERACLITUS, is assigned to the party of Custodes to guide them through the Royal Palace.

Heraclitus. Half-Armenian and half-Parthian, HERACLITUS is a loyal servant belonging to the household of SHAPUR. He is very erudite, and currently he is also acting as a teacher of Greek history to ARTZRUNI - the young officer is not very academically inclined, but he has a keen interest in learning about ancient warfare and battles. HERACLITUS himself devoted many years to the study of Greek philosophy and history, and this effort had won his current name after the famous Greek historian; however, his true motivation has always been a strong pride in Armenian culture and the will to disprove the so-called superiority of the Graeco-Roman world.

HERACLITUS has been assigned to the Custodes not only to guide them through the Palace, but, more importantly, to spy on them. Being smart and committed to the Armenian cause, he will not be easily bribed, fooled or deceived by the Custodes. HERACLITUS will do his best to keep an eye on the players, relying, if necessary, on other servants of lower ranks that are at his service.

The guest cloister (area B). If the Custodes accepted the offer of hospitality, HERACLITUS will lead them out of the Royal Palace, across the gardens (area D), and then through a guarded gate into a quiet cloister that gives access to a wing of the Citadel dedicated to guests.

While walking, the Custodes can interact with HERACLITUS, who will typically answer in a concise and minimal way. If annoyed by the questioning, he may become ironic and make remarks implying a depreciation of the Roman Empire and its envoys. Only in extreme cases, if he were to feel offended or challenged, he may become arrogant in his responses.

The cloister constitutes an open area surrounded by a colonnade. This space is shared by all the guests, although at the moment no one else is lodged here. At the center

of the cloister is a small fountain decorated with a marine basrelief. If HERACLITUS thinks any of the Custodes smart enough to understand it, he will explain the hydrodynamic principles that allow for the channeling of the water all the way up to the Citadel; his aim is, of course, to praise Armenian engineering, and demonstrate it has nothing to envy in Roman engineering. A Custos achieving a complete success in a *De Scientia* roll can discuss the topic comfortably with HERACLITUS; an exceptional success allows them to impress him.

The guarding servants. From the cloister, a door gives access to a corridor leading to the apartments for the guests. Two servants are posted to the door. They do not have weapons, but they are controlling the only passage from the Custodes’ rooms to the outside.

The presence of these guards may give the players the feeling that they are being treated more like prisoners than trusted guests. If the Custodes were to raise any reservation, HERACLITUS will just explain that the servants are there to serve them: if they were to need anything, they could just step out of the corridor and those servants will be ready to act on their requests.

The guarding servants received the order to keep under check the Custodes, tracking who is leaving the guest area and where they are going. In case the Custodes were to ask them anything, one of the two servants will leave to relay or satisfy the request, while the other one will remain at his place to comply with the task of controlling the guests. The servants, however, are neither armed nor especially brave. If they were to feel in danger they will flee without thinking twice. A convincing threat followed by complete success in a *De Bello* check will convince them to run away and hide for the rest of the day; a partial success will also intimidate them into fleeing, but they will then report to HERACLITUS in a couple of hours.

The guest apartment (area C). Passing the guards, HERACLITUS will enter into a shadowy corridor. Immediately after stepping in, he will freeze. Attentive Custodes will notice a piece of garment lying on the floor in front of him. After a second, HERACLITUS will kneel to collect the object and, after quickly glancing at it, he will put it away under his robe. He will then drop the Custodes in front of their apartment, reminding them that he himself and all the servants are at their disposal.

The apartment for the guest is composed of two rooms, one meant to be a day area and one a night area. In the day area there is a table, a small fireplace, a couple of chests containing

wool blankets, and six wooden chair of excellent manufacture. In the night area, there are six tall beds with legs carved to resemble Ionic columns, soft pillows filled with goose feathers, and richly woven covers; moreover, there are two empty wardrobes, and an hourglass. The apartment is quite Spartan in terms of furniture, while all walls are painted with sylvan scenes depicting hunting scenes in the Armenian mountains.

The apartment has a single entrance, and a medium-size window in the night area. The opening is closed by heavy curtains, and it faces another garden (area I) within the walls of the Citadel. However, between the window and the ground there is a drop of about ten meters. A marginal success in *Coordinatio* or *De Corpore* is required for a Custos to exit through the window and jump down without injuring herself.

The purple klobuk veil. If the Custodes asks questions about the veil picked up by Heraclitus, he will deflect the question saying that he is mortified that the area has not been cleaned and prepared well enough for the guests. However, he has no strong reason to hide the object, and if the Custodes were to insist, he would surrender the garment to them.

The purple garment looks like a deep purple veil. A Custos obtaining an exceptional success on a *De Societate* check (or complete success if the Custos is Armenian) would notice the similarity between the garment and a klobuk veil, part of the uniform of an Armenian *Catholicos*. Lazarus of Artaxata, if present, will also notice the similarity, and will likely share the observation with the players.

An augur may try to read beyond this simple sign a deeper meaning. A complete success on *De Magia* or *Sensibilitas* will see in the purple cloth a potential reference to the established authority being cast down; an exceptional success will connect the omen to the Armenian church and a danger potentially hanging over its leaders.

Conferring with their guide. The apartment is a safe place for the Custodes to review the recent events and discuss their action plan. Although the servants of HERACLITUS are never too far, the solid walls of the building provide them with the necessary privacy.

Unless a different treatment had been explicitly requested, the guide will also be housed in the same apartment. This provides a good opportunity for the Custodes to get an additional opinion on the encounter with SHAPUR. All the guides can provide the players with feedback on their interaction, offering an opportunity to the Narrator to point out potential breaches of the etiquette that have been committed by the players.

PAHLAV RSHTUNI, who is knowledgeable about the code of the court, may also explain the subtle meaning of some of the actions or the statements of SHAPUR; if pressed to express his own opinion, he will suggest that the attitude of

SHAPUR may border on violation of the royal majesty.

ARISTARCUS PONTINUS is unable to interpret so precisely the moves of SHAPUR, but he may inform the Custodes that SHAPUR has always held a large share of power at court; among the merchants in Dvin, two figures are recognized as holding great influence on the outcome of your trade: one is the current regent with his influence; the other is his follower ARTZRUNI who, as the head of the soldiers stationed in the city, has a large amount of discretion on who and what enters or leaves the city.

LAZARUS OF ARTAXATA will also express some reservations on the very expansive behaviour of SHAPUR, but his concerns are now focused on the purple klobuk found in the corridor. If he has not expressed himself yet, he will explain that that sort of garment is usually worn by the *Catholicos*, and he will wonder whether its discovery has been a sign of Providence.

SCENE: IN THE CITADEL

In time between the end of the first reception with SHAPUR and the night banquet, the Custodes have time to rest, move around the Royal Palace, and collect information.

Whether or not the Custodes accepted the offer of hospitality extended by SHAPUR, they will be granted freedom to move inside the Citadel, although most of the time they will be under the prying eye of HERACLITUS or one of his underlings. If the Custodes were to do something suspicious or dangerous, it is very likely that SHAPUR will learn about it in a short time. The servants are not particularly skilled in trailing guests, so a marginal success on *Sensibilitas* is enough for the Custodes to realize that someone is following them; similarly, a marginal success in *Coordinatio* will allow a Custos to evade their tail. Escaping the attention of HERACLITUS is more difficult, though, requiring an exceptional success on *Coordinatio* or a very good excuse.

Exploring the Citadel and the city. Between the meeting with Shapur and the evening banquet, the players should feel free to move across the Citadel and the city as they see fit. Their main constraint is the amount of time available: they will be able to reach only a few locations on Saturday afternoon, and then explore more places on Sunday. The Narrator should keep track of the passing time and accentuate its scarcity; players should have a feeling that their hours are limited, and that, if they want to get something out of it, they need to act quickly and wisely.

The Royal Palace (area A). The Royal Palace is the large and rich building where the Custodes have been initially taken by HETUMIAN. The Palace contains several small waiting rooms, the throne chamber where they met SHAPUR, the apartments of the King and his family, a banquet hall, and a few other rooms for various other purposes. The Palace is heavily guarded, and most of it will be inaccessible to the Custodes. Trying to sneak inside is particularly challenging, given the strict security, and it may require more than one exceptional success in *Coordinatio*. It should be clear that violating the Royal Palace is a severe offence that may compromise the entire mission.

SHAPUR and his closest advisors (including ARTZRUNI) will be staying in the Royal Palace discussing with other nobles matters related to governance. SHAPUR is very immersed in his plans and has little time to spare for the Custodes. However, if there is any pressing matter, or if the Custodes persuade HERACLITUS with a convincing reason to relay a request for

an audience, SHAPUR will concede to meet and discuss together with the Custodes again.

Asking about the court and the King. The events in the Royal Palace may have raised some suspicions in the Custodes about the state of the Court. The gardens and the areas surrounding the Royal Palace are a good place where to try to gather information.

Rolling on *Ingenium* may allow the players to gain insights on the state of the court; a partial success will hint at some sort of dichotomy among the nobles; a complete success will reveal that a large group of *nakharar* are doubtful whether King ARTASHES is the virtuous leader they would like him to be, while a smaller group seems more concerned with the pro-Parthian policies of SHAPUR; an exceptional success will suggest that the King does not enjoy a very strong reputation and that his most ardent supporters are in the Royal Guard.

Rolling on *De Societate* could instead help in gathering opinions about the King; anything less than a complete success will collect only formulaic praise, nothing more than standard statements repeated either for self-preservation or for distrust of the Custodes. A complete success will reveal some *nakharar* expressing through their teeth their opinion that the King can maintain his position only because of the support of his elite soldiers. An exceptional success will force someone to confess that the King is probably not fit to rule Armenia in these times when the fate of Armenia is more than ever contested by the two regional powers. The difficulty of this check may be decreased according to the trust the Custodes carry among the nobility. In any case, no *nakharar* suspects that the King has actually been kidnapped; they all sincerely believe he is in Artaxata with his general Mamikon or in one of his residences around the country.

The reputation of the King. King Artashes ascended the throne when he was eighteen, and by the time of the story he is twenty-six. Despite his willingness to emulate the mythic kings of old and live up to the reputation of his father, Vramshapuh, he has been unable to rule over the quarreling *nakharar* at court. The nobles have exploited his young age and inexperience to push their contrasting agendas, leading to contradictory and ineffective policies. These failures have frustrated the young King and led him to leave more and more of the administration in the hand of figures such as Shapur or Mokkat. Unscrupulously, these *nakharar* have governed and at the same time subtly ascribed every failure to the King. Unfounded stories stated to spread about him; his interest in legends, for instance, has been cast as a morbid interest in abnormal creatures. The King is not exactly a champion of virtue, and, as many youths, he does often indulge in common vices. How far these vices go, how true are the rumors spread around, and how much the general populace believe in them is left to the Narrator to decide. What is certain is that his

support among the nobility and the population is now tenuous, and only conservative factions, such as they army, are still loyal to him.

The gardens (area D). Opposite the entrance to the Royal Palace is a quiet garden with a few stone benches in the shade of apricot trees. Nakharar and officers stationed in the Citadel often meet in this area to discuss politics and state affairs, or just to relax and contemplate the city of Dvin at the feet of the fortress. This is a good place for the Custodes to build sympathy or to learn more about what is going on in the Royal Palace. A complete success in *Auctoritas* allows the players to gain the confidence and the trust of some *nakharar*.

This is also the most likely location where the Custodes may stumble into MOKAT. As an enterprising politician, he often entertains other *nakharar* here while weaving his web of alliances. Even now, the players could find him discussing privately with some nobles, patiently building the support needed for the transition of power to SHAPUR. A complete success in a *De Societate* check allows the Custodes to overhear bits of his conversation:

"There is no worry that Dvin is in safe hands now. The regent has the support of so many of us, and, importantly - as I am sure you are aware - he has the complete trust of the army.."

Later in time, on Sunday, the Custodes may see MOKAT discussing with HETUMAN in this same location. The conversation is quite lively, and it is thus easier to catch the topic of debate. Apparently, MOKAT wants HETUMAN to agree that the Royal Guard has the same duty of protection and obedience towards the regent as towards the King; Zetuman, although agreeing that the regent is the temporal replacement of the King, is skeptical in accepting the conclusions of MOKAT. The discussion, however, will end if the two were to notice that the Custodes are paying them attention. In that case they will just cease arguing and part in a polite way.

Talking to Mokat. Seeing MOKAT in the gardens, the Custodes may want to talk to him. MOKAT is a sharp and ruthless politician, and he will take advantage of the situation to embarrass the Custodes in front of the other *nakharar*. Whatever he is asked, he will provide shifty answers, and as soon as possible he will direct the conversation towards one of the following subjects: Armenian traditions, relations between Armenia and the Roman empire, or Greek and Parthian religious traditions. If the Custodes accept to discuss any of these topics, they will soon find themselves confronted with a series of

witty remarks meant to cast them as clueless servants of the Empire. For each dialogue a complete success in *De Societate* is required to keep up with MOKAT's verbal assaults. In case the Custodes have accumulated reasonable knowledge on any of these subjects (because of their background or thanks to interactions with other characters such as their guide or MOVSES KHORENATSI), the Narrator may grant them a bonus +d4. If they fail more than twice, their reputation among the *nakharar* will be sensibly diminished. On the other hand, if they manage to score two exceptional *De Societate* successes they will brilliantly outsmart MOKAT; this will not only increase their reputation about the *nakharar*, but it will also undermine MOKAT's self-confidence; in this case, MOKAT will behave more prudently and conservatively in the future, avoiding confronting the Custodes in public again.

In any case, though, MOKAT will be tight-lipped about what is going on at court under the surface of appearances.

The sacred wood (area E). A small quiet wood of old almond trees occupies the eastern end of the Citadel. A path goes across it, leading to a small cliff from which one can contemplate the city of Dvin below. Beside being a place of tranquilly, the wood is also a sacred area constituted of centuries-old trees. The forested area is big enough for someone who wants to look for some privacy, but it hardly provides a safe hideout in case of a search.

Strolling through the wood, the Custodes may meet a young scholar, MOVSES KHORENATSI, pacing back and forth while studying a parchment with deep attention. MOVSES is only eighteen year old, but he has already gained quite a reputation as a learned historian. Indeed in his hands is a document dating from the time of the Roman-Parthian War of 421-422, that he is studying in order to learn more about the events in those years. MOVSES is friendly towards the Custodes and happy to make their acquaintance. He sees interacting with them as an opportunity to learn more about the Empire, and he will eagerly ask them questions about the situation in the West. He will also gladly answer any question about Armenian history or culture:

"Our family line stretches far back into the ancient past, and has been prolific in deeds both wise and brave. I have been working on a history of all of the Armenian noble families, starting from the records in the histories of the Greeks. One day this will be the first complete history of our nation!"

MOVSES is not bragging, and his knowledge about Armenian history is truly impressive: he can talk at length about the foundation of Dvin

or the Roman-Parthian war; he can introduce the Custodes to local traditions; he can explain to them Zoroastrian rituals; he also can teach the Armenian alphabet. He will constitute a resource for the Custodes whenever they want to learn something about Armenia. The only exception is courtly politics: although aware of the plots and the networks of powers, he will refuse to discuss the politics of the Royal Palace.

The noble apartments (area F). Two rich buildings provide accommodation for the extended family of the King and for some of the *nakharar* who live at Court. A good number of the nobles that the Custodes have seen in the audience with the regent reside in these apartments, including ARTZRUNI. After official business, they go back to this area to rest and relax. This is a good place where the Custodes may go to look for *nakharar* with whom they want to talk. Notice that MOKAT is an exception as he lives in his own house in Dvin not far from the Citadel.

As in the case of the Royal Palace, this area is also heavily guarded, and an exceptional success on *Coordinatio* is required to sneak in unseen. While trespassing in this area is not as grave an offense as breaking into the Royal Palace, MOKAT will see that such a violation will be severely punished and used as a justification for the breakdown of the relationship with the Roman Empire.

If any of the Custodes manages to infiltrate the apartments of ARTZRUNI and obtains a complete success in an *Ingenium* roll, he or she may find a small bundle of letters exchanged between ARTZRUNI and MOKAT. These incriminating letters, written in the new Armenian language, discuss details of the arrival of Parthian troops and the impending seizure of power by SHAPUR.

The standards of the *nakharar*. Outside the noble apartments, several standards with the crest of the different *nakharar* families are hung. They are meant to signal the presence of the *nakharar* in the noble apartments, as well as to proclaim the fame of their families. Any Armenian could easily point out the standards of the Arsacid (the family of the King), the Mamikon, the Shapur, the Hetuman, the Artzruni and the Mokat among others. A striking absence is the family Rshtuni, which PAHLAV RSHTUNI, if present, is quick to notice and remark upon. Indeed, in the midst of all these standards, a few open spots suggest that some crests may have been recently taken down. The missing banners belong to some of the most loyalist families which in the previous years have been sent away from the capital with various accusations of unworthy conduct or, even,

betrayal. This campaign of expulsions has been managed by MOKAT with the full support of SHAPUR.

PAHLAV RSHTUNI is not informed about the fate of the branch of his family that used to live at court, as the events that led to their exile are too recent. However, thanks to a defamation campaign led by MOKAT, everyone in city is aware of how the Rshtuni family “wanted to declare war on VAHRAM and take lead of the country”. Thanks to his age and his memory, MOKAT is able to recognize in the guide PAHLAV RSHTUNI as a member of the hated Rshtuni family. If possible, MOKAT will subtly direct his criticism at PAHLAV RSHTUNI and try to undermine him.

The banishment of the Rshtuni. The Rshtuni family has traditionally been very close with the monarch's family. In the previous months, it has shown unflinching support for Artashes, and some of its members started being suspicious about the ambitions of Shapur. In March, Mokat unscrupulously masterminded an accident at court in agreement with Parthian emissaries. He deceived members of the Rshtuni family and led them to misunderstand and offend the ambassadors of the King of Kings. After the complaint of the insulted emissaries, and with the evidence of some treacherous handwritten letters forged by Mokat, Artashes had no other option than to send the members of the Rshtuni family back, in disgrace, to their ancestral lands.

The servants' quarters (area G). A smaller building in the southern part of the Citadel houses the quarters where all the servants for the Royal Palace are housed. From the outside, the building melds elegantly with the rich facade of the other constructions in the Citadel. On the inside, however, it is quite chaotic and lively; the space is partitioned into a myriad of smaller and overcrowded rooms where the majority of the servants and their families live. Custodes may stop in this area if they are looking for any of the servants. If they have the trust of any one of them, this area would also be a good place where to hide.

Barracks and guard posts (area H). The entrance to the Citadel is guarded by a series of constructions that act as a local garrison, a checkpoint, and a guard post. Anyone entering or leaving the Citadel will pass under the eyes of the soldiers posted at this location. Normally, between twenty and thirty soldiers of the Armenian Army are distributed at the gates, within the building, or on the walls, although reinforcements may quickly arrive from the army fortress in case of a crisis. Next to the main guard post there is also a stable, where the horses of visiting *nakharar* are taken care of.

ARTZRUNI can be found in this area bragging with the soldiers, training with them, or taking

them around on patrols. Despite a certain arrogant tone in his behavior, it seems like his authority is well-respected by the soldiers; he constantly earns their admiration with actions, not words: he is always on the front line and does not eschew risks. If the Custodes are in this location in the evening, they will see ARTZRUNI hastily leave to descend into town and go to the *House of Tauriz*.

Notice that the Royal Guard has almost no role in this area. The valuable soldiers of the Royal Guard are normally protecting the King and the Royal Palace, and they are sent for dull duties like manning the gates of the Citadel only as a punishment if they show lack of discipline or they do not attend to their orders.

Talking to Artzruni. If the Custodes try to interact directly with ARTZRUNI in the barracks, he will initially respond to them in a direct, but defensive manner. Not being a skilled orator, he will be suspicious of the intentions of the visitors, and think of them as meddling foreigners. In particular, if any question seems to put his person or his authority in doubt, he will push back in a blunt way, possibly bordering on adversarial. On the other hand, praising him or acknowledging his authority would ease him into being more talkative. Custodes will find out that he is very happy to boast of his military exploits, and equally happy to hear similar stories. Once loosened, ARTZRUNI will make no secret of his closeness to SHAPUR and MOKAT, and his scorn for the ruler ARTASHES. However friendly, he will not however volunteer the reasons for his allegiances at the court nor mention his role in the disappearance of the King. Still, ARTZRUNI is potentially the weaker link in the plot: if the Custodes manage to win his confidence through manly bragging and drinking, or if they can score an exceptional success in *Auctoritas* or *De Societate*, they may learn more about his allegiance to SHAPUR and they may even convince or bribe him to surrender his support for the Regent.

In the absence of General MAMIKON, ARTZRUNI also holds a significant amount of influence over the Army stationed in the army fortress and within the Citadel. Although the authority should be shared with HETUMIAN, he definitely has the upper hand. Independently from his specific feelings towards the Custodes, he will be always ready to help them with requests and permits if they allow him to show off his authority, and especially if the assertion of his authority comes at the expense of the ROYAL GUARD and its head, HETUMIAN.

The backgarden (area I). A small garden is hidden behind the guests' apartments, between

the walls of the Citadel and the sacred wood (area E). The area is secluded and rarely patrolled by the guards. However, the garden is well curated, and in a corner the Custodes may notice a small and ancient altar in neat condition. Custodes may escape their surveillance by dropping from their apartment into this area. The gardens constitute also a quiet place where to hold private rendez-vous, if necessary.

The Zoroastrian altar. The altar in the backgarden is made by a low and ancient marble slate placed under a wooden roof. The marble bore some form of basrelief or inscription which has now been erased. Over the altar itself stand a large metal brazier and a ceramic vessel filled with water. Within the brazier, a small burning oil lamp has been placed. Historical knowledge about Persia, or a marginal success in a *De Magia* or *De Scientia* roll allows it to be identified as a Zoroastrian fire-altar; a complete success identifies it as an *atash dagdah*, the simplest form of fire temple, which may be tended by lay persons; an exceptional success will allow one to establish that the altar must be a few centuries old, pre-dating the official foundation of Dvin, and that originally the altar must have been dedicated to some Zoroastrian spirit, before the inscriptions were erased and the altar converted into an *atash dagdah*. The presence of a lit oil lamp should suggest that the altar is currently taken care of, and indeed, every day at noon, the Custodes may notice a servant, Adarbad, coming to refill the oil and change the water in the vessel. Adarbad is a Zoroastrian faithful, and he will happily and zealously answer questions the Custodes have about his religion. He will not hide the fact that he belongs to the house of Mokat, and that Heraclitus has tasked him with taking good care of this old altar.

The army fortress (area J). A large solid fortress rises next to the Royal Palace, housing the Royal Guard and several detachments of the army. The thick stone walls, the sentries at the door, and the guards on the rampart confer the feeling of an inexpugnable place. The guards from the fortress provide the martial force needed to protect and provide legitimacy to the King and his court. Also, in the extreme case of war and siege, the fortress may turn into a safe keep where the royal family may find shelter.

The main authority in the fortress is the head of the Royal Guard, HETUMIAN. He is in charge of the Royal Guard, and, theoretically of the soldiers of the army committed to the Citadel. However, because of tensions between the red-cloaked Royal Guard and the Armenian Army, soldiers of the Army are sometimes divided between following the orders of HETUMIAN or their direct superiors in the Army. The tension has become even more problematic as ARTZRUNI has on more than one occasion challenged the authority of HETUMIAN, issuing directives in clear opposition to the orders of the chief of the Royal Guard.

The Custodes may find a few ways to enter the fortress. They could, for instance, request to speak with HETUMIAN; the officer, especially if impressed by the first encounter on the road, will promptly invite them inside fortress. They may alternatively try to obtain an official permit; in this case, ARTZRUNI will readily produce one, just to annoy HETUMIAN through a display of his own authority. The Custodes may also try to exploit the disagreements between the Royal Guard and the Armenian Army to pretend they obtained the right authorizations from the respective leaders; a marginal success in *Auctoritas* will allow them to play on these differences to get in. Once inside, the Custodes may be allowed sufficient trust to move around arbitrarily through the main courtyard, the various barracks hosting the soldiers, the officers' quarters, the mess hall, the armories, and the underground prison.

Notice that trying to sneak in (exceptional success in *Coordination*) or pretending to be a guard (exceptional success in *Auctoritas*) are very risky; in case of a fail, force will be used to arrest and throw in jail the intruders.

The prison. Below the army fortress, a small network of caves and dungeons has been converted into a prison, where criminals and enemies of the Kingdom are held. About fifty cells are present, and all are in use. Most of them are overcrowded, hosting between four and five inmates each. The majority of the prisoners are common criminals, with a few dangerous murderers kept under special custody. There are also a dozen opponents of SHAPUR; in the last months, as his authority grew, SHAPUR managed to have some of his political enemies arrested on the grounds of false accusations; at the passage of the Custodes, these prisoners will proclaim their innocence more loudly than anyone else, and if they can confer with them, they will warn them not to trust SHAPUR.

In one of the most peripheral cells, the Royal Army has confined GOLON and a couple of other foreign merchants accused of having overstepped the mercantile boundary of Artaxata. On request of MOKAT, these prisoners have been committed to more spacious cells and are treated better than common criminals. Near the ceiling, their cell has a small slit window with a metal grate looking outside at the level of the street. If the Custodes were to scout around the fortress they may find this slit window which could allow them to talk to GOLON without entering the fortress.

GOLON has been arrested by a small group of soldiers of the Armenian Army on direct orders from SHAPUR. Upon arrest he was accused of

having violated the law preventing Greek merchants to travel beyond the confines of Artaxata. GOLON, who claims Armenian ancestry and has been in Dvin for many years, is terrified that the real reason behind the arrest may be the information and the services he has provided to the Empire over the years. Surprised by their visit, he will plead with the Custodes in a very scared tone:

"They came in the middle of the day... Into my shop... They said I was not supposed to be there... That Greek merchants should stay in their place... Never cross beyond Artaxata... But my family, my mother, is Armenian... I never had any problem... Could they... could they... know?"

In his current state, GOLON is not the best source of information. His mind is fogged by fear, and he is constantly afraid that someone may be listening. He will be torn between helping the Custodes in the hope they will find a way to free him and trying to keep the conversation short and references vague not to implicate himself. In any case, he will be open and direct on advising the Custodes not to trust SHAPUR:

"The regent... be careful with him... and with his councilor... The only thing he cares about is power... Power, and more power... I don't believe the King is... But now you need to go... The guard may come at any moment!"

It will require some convincing on the part of the Custodes for him to go on. If the players manage to calm him, or if they obtain at least a marginal success in a *Auctoritas* roll, he will share with them his suspicion that SHAPUR is preparing a coup during which any Greek authority will be ousted from Armenia. If they are particularly persuasive, or if they obtain a complete success in *Auctoritas*, he will suggest that SHAPUR's machinations may be already in play, and that the absence of the King at this moment, when the arrival of an embassy was known, is hard to explain:

"In Artaxata? And who told you the King went to Artaxata? Shapur? I do not believe Artashes left the city..."

The last statement, although correct, is just a gut feeling, and GOLON has no way to substantiate it.

As they prepare to move on, GOLON will again beg the Custodes to swear in the name of Mercury and Apollo that they will come back to save him. The gaze of their tutelary deities may focus on the Custodes in this moment; in particular, anyone whose numen is Mercury or Apollo will feel compelled to make an oath to save GOLON. If necessary, the Custodes should be reminded that such an oath is a very

important duty, and not acting on it would cause the ire of their tutelary deity.

INTERLUDE: IN THE CITY

Beyond moving around the Citadel, the Custodes are free to leave its walls and explore the city. Dvin is a large and bustling city, where it is easy to get lost. All the guides have limited familiarity with the city, either because they have not been here in many years (LAZARUS OF ARTAXATA, PAHLAV RSHTUNI) or because not authorized to travel beyond Artaxata (ARISTARCUS PONTINUS); yet they all have the sufficient familiarity with Armenia to find their way around and lead the Custodes wherever they want to go.

HERACLITUS will not miss the opportunity to offer himself or another servant as a knowledgeable guide; this would of course allow him to track all the activities of the Custodes for his master SHAPUR. If the offer is refused, HERACLITUS will nonetheless set one of his servants on their heels. Thanks to the chaos in the street, however, it would be easy for the Custodes to lose their undesired follower; indeed, a mention that they intend to do so will be enough to be freed of HERACLITUS' henchman without any skill roll.

Locations in Dvin. If the Custodes were to ask around which places are worth visiting in Dvin, they would probably be recommended to stop by the central market or pay homage to the Cathedral of Saint Grigor. The city has much to offer, and whatever service or product the Custodes may be interested in, they could find it somewhere in the city. Not all locations can probably be visited by the Custodes given their time constraints; still, if desired, the Narrator is invited to design alternative locations, either connected to the background of the Custodes or tied to the political scheming under way in the court.

Looking for Golon. Remembering the instruction given by FLAVIUS DYONISUS, the Custodes may try to get in touch with their contact, the merchant GOLON. To do this, they may hang a purple cloth from the window of the guest room and then go into town looking for GOLON. If they were to mention their intention to ARISTARCUS PONTINUS, their guide will actually tell them that he knows a merchant by that name, and he will happily accompany them and help to spot GOLON. However, no matter the effort or the time spent, GOLON is nowhere to be found. A complete success in a *De Societate* roll will bring to the surface the rumor that the merchant has been arrested in last few days; the difficulty of this roll may be lowered if the Custodes enjoy the trust of the Armenian populace.

The sad fate of Golon. Golon had been arrested on the past Thursday together with a couple of other merchants.

The charge, however, had nothing to do with his work as an agent for the Empire. Golon had been trading in Dvin on the ground that his stated half-Armenian descent allows him to do business in the capital. Unfortunately for him, Shapur, who is now in charge, has a different opinion: that, as a merchant trading Greek goods, he is not allowed to travel beyond Artaxata. In truth, Shapur does not care about these commercial regulations very much: he had decided to arrest Golon and a few other merchants in order to promise to liberate them during the Saturday banquet as a gesture of munificence towards the Empire.

Asking about the King. Further gathering of intelligence about the King may be performed through the streets of Dvin. If the Custodes are able to inspire some confidence among the local population, they may easily collect some opinions concerning the King with a *De Societate* skill roll. In case of no successes, the Custodes will hear only lukewarm comments of approval about the King. With a marginal success, they will stumble into a number of common people saddened to recognize that the current ruler does not compare well to his father, the departed VRAMSHAPUH. A complete success will gather that a part of the locals are unhappy that the ruler seems not to care much about the populace, as he reckons that his power depends on the army and the backing of the Roman Empire. An exceptional success will bring to surface darker stories, suggesting that the King may indulge in vicious past times, like hunting and torturing exotic creatures, instead of governing the country.

The central market. The central market is the liveliest area of the city, a sprawling bazaar with dozens of shops and stalls where colours, smells and languages from all over the ancient world mix together in a rich and manifold tapestry. The Narrator should emphasize feelings of awe and surprise: the Custodes may see precious spices sold at very cheap prices, exotic animals from the Far Southeast Asia, unusual wares from China.

The central market is also an excellent place where to collect rumors and information or where to hire individuals to perform tasks. If the Custodes enjoy a good reputation among the population, and if they prove themselves to be good customers, merchants in the marketplace will turn out to be good sources of intelligence; according to the discretion of the Narrator, suitable successes in *De Societate* skill rolls may provide more information on the state of the court, the reputation of ARTASHES and SHAPUR, the arrest of GOLON, or the absence of the *Catholicos*.

The Cathedral of Saint Grigor. A large Church in a style reminiscent of Roman architecture stands proudly on the south-western side of the

Dvin. The building is dedicated to SAINT GREGORY THE ILLUMINATOR, the founder of the Armenian Apostolic Church. Inside, the building is divided in three naves, with elegant carved columns supporting the roof; the space is dark but a number of candles light up the paintings and the mosaics on the walls; among them, stand out a representation of *Christ Pantocrator* in the apse over the altar, and a portrait of ST GREGOR over the entrance. Believers constantly come and go, lighting candles and kneeling to pray, attesting to the rootedness of the Christian faith among the population. Because of the absence of the *Catholicos*, only smaller celebrations are held on Saturday, mostly headed by different Armenian priests. A larger crowd attends for the Sunday mass, when the blessing of SAHAK attracts many of the faithfuls. If the Custodes show due respect and behave according to the Christian etiquette while in the Cathedral they may improve their standing in the eyes of the Armenian people; however, this same behavior may also cause the unhappiness of their tutelary deities.

The Palace of the Catholicos. To the side of the Cathedral, a two-story residence hosts the *Catholicos* SAHAK. The building has a rustic appearance, with visible bricks and small windows on the upper floor. The main entrance is a robust wooden door with carved stories from the gospels.

The building is protected by a small company of ten soldiers belonging to the Armenian Army. Five of them are stationed by the main entrance, while the remaining five provide surveillance from the other sides. Although these soldiers are officially sent to serve and protect the SAHAK, they were given the strict order of not letting anyone go inside or outside. Since they received this direction from ARTZRUNI in person, the soldiers are very likely to abide by it; only if the Custodes have been able to win a good reputation among the Armenians, and only obtaining an exceptional success in *Auctoritas* will they be able to get access to the Palace. Sneaking inside is similarly challenging because of the crowd around the Cathedral, the strict surveillance, and the height of the windows; again, an exceptional success in *Coordinatio* is required to succeed in this feat; failure will immediately prompt the reaction of the guard which will proceed to arrest the offender. A perceived crime against the *Catholicos* may also negatively affect the reputation of the Custodes.

The house arrest of the Catholicos. The *Catholicos* Sahak sees in the alliance with the Roman Empire an important guarantee for the safety of the Armenian Church. Therefore, Sahak is a strong supporter of the King Artashes

and his Greek-friendly policies. Shapur, aware of the influence of the *Catholicos* over a large section of the population, had tried, in vain, to bring Sahak to his side. Having failed, Shapur had decided to lock the *Catholicos* in his Palace during the transition of power. For this reason he dispatched, on Friday night, a contingent of soldiers with the imperative order of not releasing the *Catholicos*, or anyone else, until further instructions are given. Sahak, who was looking forward to meeting with the emissaries of the Empire, had been taken by surprise, and he is now locked inside with no way of contacting the Custodes.

Meeting SAHAK. If they manage to get inside the place of the *Catholicos*, the Custodes will find themselves in a stern building, reminiscent of a monastery. Several walls and most everyday objects are decorated with religious images and symbols. Around twenty people, including clergy and servants, are locked inside the Palace. They are all very loyal to SAHAK and, knowing the desire of the *Catholicos* to meet the emissaries of the Emperor, they will help the Custodes hiding from the soldiers or simply leading to the *Catholicos*.

The *Catholicos* lives in a large but simple room where the only elements of furniture are a simple bed with a rough woolen blanket, a desk covered in sheets and parchment, and a wooden genuflexorium. When entering, the Custodes will likely find SAHAK kneeling and praying at the genuflexorium. The coming of the Custodes is seen by SAHAK as the working of God, and, standing up, he will welcome their arrival and move to embrace them:

"Have thou trust in the Lord, of all thine heart; and lean thou not unto thy prudence. In all thy ways think on him, and he shall dress thy goings."

SAHAK is a strong believer, and his dialogues will be, whenever possible, full of references to the Bible and the life of the Armenian Church. His piety is well known and has won many supporters and admirers among the people in Dvin. He is not politically well-versed and believes that prayer and repentance is what Armenia and the court of Dvin needs.

SAHAK is a supporter of ARTASHES mainly on religious grounds. He believes that monarchy is part of a divine covenant, and that his duty is to unflinchingly support the King. He is not aware (or only dimly) of the possibly bad reputation of ARTASHES and of crimes that could have undermine his right to kingship - SAHAK has likely turned a deaf ear to all such gossips in an effort to remain outside of any court intrigue. However, his isolation was broken when, during the last week, he was contacted by SHAPUR. SAHAK will freely talk about that disagreeable event:

"Last Thursday, after the morning service, I was summoned by the regent. I never let slip the opportunity to talk with a person who has not yet found the right road. For, a physician is not needful to men that fare well, but to men that be evil-at-ease. The meeting brought bad tidings. There, in the throne room, Shapur and his counselor Mokat made strange remarks, spelt poisonous words against the King. When I rejected their insinuations, and invited them to pray God to bestow his graceful gifts on our king Artashes, Shapur lost his composure, called on Persian demons, and... sat himself on the throne! After which Mokat discharged me."

Remembering the events of that day is a source of pain and puzzlement for SAHAK. Although the acts of SHAPUR had a clear political overtone, the *Catholicos* is reading what happened from a religious point of view: some demon must have taken hold of the soul of the good SHAPUR, and everyone should now pray for his recovery. Despite this passive stance, SAHAK will nonetheless be willing to support the effort of the Custodes, as long as these are clearly meant to protect the Armenian Church or the king. Having SAHAK on their side will win the Custodes the approval of the large community of Armenian Christians in Dvin; this in turn, may offer the Custodes the possibility of acquiring information and material assistance.

Sign or Portent. If the Custodes reference the finding of the klobuk veil on the way to their apartments, Sahak will be quick to interpret that event as a sign of the Providence at work. This may spark an interesting discussion between the *Catholicos* and the Custodes on whether such an event is to be seen as a sign (sent from the gods of the Empire) or a miracle (ordained by God). The tutelary deities of the players will certainly pay attention to this discussion and be ready to pass judgement on their loyalty.

The report for the Cohors Auxiliaria Arcana. Upon request, SAHAK will provide the Custodes with the report they were supposed to collect. The document will be provided in an envelope closed with the official seal of the *Catholicos*. If asked about the content, he will explain very briefly:

"Signs and portents from the border of the Empire. Signs and portents, I am afraid, of the end of times."

However, he will refuse to give further explanation or discuss how he obtained these documents.

Khalkotauri. The envelope provided by Sahak contains about twenty pages of notes in different handwriting reporting about the sighting of *Khalkotauri*, monstrous fire-breathing bulls with bronze hooves and mouths. The Narrator should feel free to change the content of these document and/or use them as a possible hook for another adventure.

The Walls. A thick ring wall dotted by 44 towers surrounds the city of Dvin. The walls integrate perfectly with the natural slopes and cliffs, providing a formidable protection for the town and the Citadel. While some sections of the walls are not constantly manned, sentries are assigned to all the towers and gates. Direct paths connect the towers to the Citadel, where soldiers normally report after duty, and where they receive orders from their officers or from ARTZRUNI in person.

Important entrance gates are located on the eastern side of the wall, facing the Cathedral of Saint Grigor; smaller gates open to the south and the north. All the gates are normally open during the day, allowing the traffic of merchants and farmers to enter and leave the city; the Custodes are free to come and go as they please. During the night, the gates are usually closed; although the Custodes have the right and authorization to go wherever they want, moving around at night will look suspicious; a good reason, or a marginal success in *Auctoritas*, will be required of the Custodes to persuade the local soldiers to open the door and let them go through. Unless the reason is very compelling, or they achieve a complete success in their skill roll, the guards will report their movements and the news will reach the ears of SHAPUR.

The Demolished Tower. Originally, the towers along the walls amounted to 45. However, many years past, one of them, precariously built on a northeastern slope crumbled during a particularly fierce storm. Immediately after, reports from some of the soldiers assigned to that area claimed that the tower has been crushed by the fist of Tauriz, a powerful and dangerous *daeua*; furthermore, strange and inhuman cries have been reported from time to time by locals. Because of these superstitions, and because that side of the city is already defended by the natural orography, the tower was never rebuilt. Still now, people in the town refer to it as the *House of Tauriz*, and keep far from it as much as possible.

With his typical defiance, ARTZRUNI and a few other officers of the Royal Army dared to explore the ruins, just to discover that no spirit seemed to live there. While the tower was unusable, part of its basement was still intact, and it could be accessed via a small hidden gate that had not been totally covered by rubble. When SHAPUR, MOKAT and ARTZRUNI orchestrated the kidnapping of ARTASHES, ARTZRUNI came up with the idea of imprisoning ARTASHES in the depths of the *House of Tauriz*: the dungeon was unknown to most, superstition kept anyone away, and no one would ever hear the screams

of the King.

ARTASHES has been kept in the tower since Wednesday night. His attempts to call for help or escape were soon frustrated by the darkness and isolation of his cell. No voice has escaped the ruins. Four guards are constantly posted by the *House of Tauriz*. These soldiers have been given the simple order to prevent anyone from accessing the ruins; they have no idea who is held inside, and they just believe they are keeping potential looters away in order to avoid disturbing the rest of *Tauriz*; they themselves would not dare to step inside the tower for fear of the *daeva*. To avoid any contact between the prisoner and the guards, ARTZRUNI in person takes charge of delivering food and any essentials to the King in the evening, during the change of the guard posted outside the tower.

The Custodes can easily discover the existence of the demolished tower by scouting the walls, or even by just walking through the northeastern sector of the city. Gathering information around the city, or asking their guide, the Custodes can learn about the legend of the *House of Tauriz* and the superstitions surrounding it. Learning about the King being trapped into the dungeon is more difficult as few individuals are aware of it. SHAPUR, ARTZRUNI, MOKAT are all part of the plot, but they are too deeply involved to confess to the kidnapping; only under extreme pressure, and possibly blackmailing, would one of them suggest the possibility that the King may be held somewhere in Dvin. Talking with the *Catholicos* SAHAK may instead reveal that someone may be imprisoned or will be imprisoned in the *House of Tauriz*.

The arrest of the King. The kidnapping of King Artashes happened discreetly on the night of Thursday, three nights before the arrival of the Custodes, according to the plan devised by Shapur, Artzruni, Mokkat. The King had been invited for a dinner at Mokkat's residence. Since he had frequently dined with his counselor, and since he trusted him, he had gone to the appointment with minimal security. With the help of the wine, Mokkat managed to have the King promise that he "will visit Mamikon as soon as possible", so that those present would hear his intentions. Late that night, when the tipsy King was alone, Artzruni, with four other trusted soldiers as backup, overpowered Artashes and, once unconscious, they took him to the *House of Tauriz*. The remaining guards at the dinner had been informed by Mokkat that the King had decided to act on his intention right away, and had chosen to ride to Artaxata with Artzruni and other soldiers in great urgency. Partially drunk and confused the guard accepted the story of Mokkat. Tact had been very important to carry out the abduction. In particular, it avoided a possible open confrontation with Hetumian and his Royal Guard. Although the Royal Guards loyal to Hetumian would have been outnumbered by the soldiers of the Armenian Army ready to listen to the orders of Artzruni, Shapur did not want a crisis, or, even worse, a civil war to ensue; not, at least, until the Parthian backup promised by Vahram had

reached the town. Once Artashes had been handed over to the Parthian contingent, Shapur's authority would have been officially recognized, and Hetumian or even General Mamikon in Artaxata would have to accept the change of regime. The plan worked out perfectly, and now only the conspirators know exactly the whereabouts of the King. The four soldiers that assisted Artzruni have been promoted and reassigned to four different military detachments in the countryside far from Dvin. In this way, the story that the King has left with guards of the Armenian Army may be held more strongly, and any possible betrayer is too far from the capital to compromise the ascent of Shapur.

SCENE: THE SATURDAY BANQUET

In the evening, the Custodes are expected to take part in a special banquet organized by SHAPUR. Once again, the occasion will be very formal, with a precise schedule of courses and events. The invitation is only apparently optional: the Custodes will need extremely good reasons to miss the appointment. Failing to show up will seriously undermine the reputation of the Custodes, not only among the supporters of SAHAK, but also among the loyalists of the King, who will see their behaviours as an overt offense towards Armenia.

If the Custodes are in the guest apartments, HERACLITUS will offer to lead them to the banquet hall. Otherwise, the players may show up of their own initiative at the Royal Palace, where local servants will lead them to the banquet hall.

The timing of the banquet. The Narrator is free to set the time of the banquet as it best fits the developing story. In general, the banquet should not be so early that the Custodes do not have time to do anything on Saturday afternoon, nor so late that they are able to explore the whole city. The banquet should work as an intermission between the initial survey of the city by the Custodes and the actual investigations taking place on Sunday morning and afternoon.

The banquet hall. A banquet hall has been set up in the same Throne Room where the Custodes previously met with SHAPUR. A large rectangular wooden table has been placed in the center of the room. Around it, low wooden chairs with rich gold gilding and soft red cushions are meticulously placed. The disposition of the seats has been carefully studied:

- The head of the table is occupied by SHAPUR himself, and it has been scenographically placed so that right behind him is the actual empty throne; the implication should be quite obvious, as anyone entering the room would see SHAPUR directly under the Throne.
- To the right of SHAPUR a special seat has been prepared for SURMAK, an Armenian priest, who is supposed to personify the religious authority in the country.
- The Custodes and their guide have been reserved the other seats of honor to the right and left of the Regent, so that they may confer directly with SHAPUR, thus strengthening his authority.
- Next to the Custodes are the seats of MOKAT, ARTZRUNI and other *nakharar* loyal to SHAPUR. These guests are tasked with referring any important conversation back to SHAPUR, and,

in case of necessity, of supporting SHAPUR and putting pressure on the Custodes.

- The remaining seats have been assigned to a few other moderate *nakharar* that have not openly expressed their support for SHAPUR.
- Finally, directly opposite to the head of the table, with its back towards the entrance, is the place of HETUMIAN. The captain of the Royal Guard could not be kept out from such an important event, but he is relegated to the farthest seat from which he has no chance of taking part in the important discussions between the Regent and the Custodes.

By the time the Custodes have shown up, most of the guests have already arrived and taken their seats. The table has been prepared with a white silken cloth, fine dishes, silvery knives, golden chalices and pots of water. *Nakharar* are mingling and chatting around the table, while servants are busily moving behind the columns bringing drinks and wine upon request.

As the Custodes step in, all gazes will move upon them and SHAPUR will warmly greet them:

"Come forth, friends of the Empire! Come forth, my honored guests! Come, take your seats next to me, and let these banquet be a blessing upon the understanding between our peoples!"

In this speech, as in all his statements during the evening, SHAPUR will always use a lofty and royal register; the very aim of the banquet is for him to shine in front of the congregation of *nakharar* and have his leadership approved.

The first course. When the Custodes have taken their seats, SHAPUR will command with a gesture of his hand for the banquet to start. Servants will pour out from behind the column bringing large platters of spiced skewered meat. The food is cooked according to the Armenian tradition and of highest quality. Wine and drinks are also liberally served.

As the first course is distributed around, SHAPUR will first introduce SURMAK:

"Let me introduce you to Father Surmak, who you may have not yet met. A man of wisdom, whose advice I always trust. His faith is a solid bridge between us."

Despite this presentation, SHAPUR has a low opinion of SURMAK and he keeps the priest next to him only to provide a religious legitimization to his rulership. Notice also that, unless he has explicit reasons not to do so, SHAPUR will just assume that SURMAK and the Custodes share the same faith.

SURMAK, aware of his weak position since he is officially subordinated to the *Catholicos*, will

keep a serious facade and pronounce himself sparingly. Lazarus of Artaxata, if present, will be suspicious of the role of SURMAK, but he will politely avoid voicing any doubt during the banquet. If SURMAK's role comes into discussion, he will not deny the *Catholicos*' authority, but he will comment that the age and the state of the patriarch require considering who will lead the Armenian Church in the close future, thus hinting at himself as the best choice as future *Catholicos*. During such an explanation, SHAPUR will nod in approval.

The exchange of gifts. Towards the end of the first course, SHAPUR will stand up and command the attention of everyone in the room:

"Tonight the noblest of guests are honouring our courts. It would speak ill of this court, of our whole kingdom, if we were not to express the gratitude we feel towards the Greek Empire in the most generous way we can afford."

The brief speech will end with a round of clapping: MOKAT, immediately followed by the other *nakharar*, will start banging on the table to express approval. With a gesture of his hand, SHAPUR will order two servants to bring in two small chests. He will then shift his attention towards the Custodes, expecting one or more of them to come forward with their gifts.

Unless the Custodes have received clear instructions from their guide, they may feel at loss with respect to the protocol for the exchange of gifts. Etiquette would require one of them to stand up and express gratitude towards SHAPUR or Armenia in similarly lofty terms. Also, the Custodes, being the guests, would be expected to present their gift to the host first. The behaviour of the Custodes will of course be evaluated by the *nakharar* and it will affect the respect the *nakharar* tribute to the players.

SHAPUR will receive the gifts. Being unable to provide any present or an attempt to deliver them to someone else in the room will be cause of great offense. The gifts that the THEODOSIUS had selected for the Armenian King have a subtle double meaning: the silver scepter acknowledges the authority of the Armenian King, but it does not elevate it to the golden rank of the Emperor; the box with scrolls of the New Testament remarks on the implicit support of the Empire for Christianity against Zoroastrianism. These implications are clear to SHAPUR: he will receive such gifts while putting up a good face, although he will remember the silent affront.

The gifts selected by SHAPUR are a green gem inlaid with the white profile of a city and a bronze cross. The gem is a product of great refinement and value made by Armenian

artisans; the city represented is supposed to be Dvin itself, the new capital of the kingdom. This present is meant to underline the prestige and the richness of Armenia. The bronze cross is a large and bare artifact bearing no human figure or inscription. This present is a nod to the faith of the Empire, but it also express a degree of distance and disinterest on the part of the Armenian court.

The second course. As the exchange of gifts concludes, SHAPUR will have the servants resume the banquet. A second course starts immediately as the servants bring in large platters of lamb dolmatas, flat bread and vegetables. Food again is very good, and all the *nakharar* will enjoy taking part.

The discussion will naturally turn to the gifts that have just been exchanged. Opinions will follow the normal etiquette: all the *nakharar* will praise the gifts of the Empire and will expect the Custodes to express similar sentiments. A few sharper *nakharar*, like MOKAT, may make subtle insinuations related to the meaning or the value of the presents.

The tale of Esfandiyar. Towards the end of the second course, or if SHAPUR is in need of interrupting an uncomfortable political discussion, a musician will be invited to the hall to entertain the audience with traditional songs and stories. A rich seat will be brought in the room, and after a while an old man dressed in white silk and carrying a *tar*, a traditional string instrument, will take the stage.

As the musician enters, silence descends in the room. Everyone's attention is now focused on the chanter. In the midst of the hall he slowly plucks the strings of his tar, filling the space with warm and sad notes. "Listen! Listen to the tales of Armenia of old. Listen to the tale of Esfandiyar!"

A shiver of excitement crosses the room as the singer reveals the topic of his ensuing songs. Esfandiyar is an old Persian hero, a great warrior and a defender of Zoroastrianism. The topic has been clearly carefully selected, and it is not hard to guess that SHAPUR or MOKAT may have had a say in this.

The singing will last for about one hour, during which time the audience will be enthralled by the musician. This form of entertainment is kept in high regard, and the listeners pay great attention to every word sung. Most of the singing happens in traditional Armenian, but key passages and bridges are offered for this special occasion in Greek too, so that the guests may follow the main events in the story even if they do not understand the local language.

The specific episode being told is one of the famous seven labors of Esfandiyar: the fight

against two man-eating lions. As the story evolves, the mood in the room will also rise and plunge: anxiety when Esfandiyar is in danger, cheers and joy when he defeats his enemies. If the Custodes pay attention to SHAPUR they will see his face glow with pride at the triumphs of Esfandiyar; in his mind, he sees himself as a novel Persian hero, a defender of the old religion, and a champion of Armenia against the two threatening neighbours personified by the two lions of the story.

The dessert. By the time the story of Esfandiyar is over, the servants will bring into the room a final dessert of yoghurt and pomegranate seeds. These last delicacies will be consumed in the atmosphere of excitement left behind by the end of the tale of Esfandiyar. Every *nakharar* will be more than happy to talk and explain more about Armenian traditional folklore. Expressing interest and respect for their cultural heritage will easily allow the Custodes to win influence over the local *nakharar*.

The presentation of the prisoners. As the night draws towards its conclusion, SHAPUR will stand one last time and raise his chalice towards the guests:

"Sweet has been this night with our honored guests and may many more days bring together our peoples, the mighty Greek Empire and the royal Kingdom of Armenia. To seal our unity and understanding, let me offer you a last gift from the depth of my generosity." A large smile, certainly extended by many drinks, shines on the face of Shapur, while silence descends in the room.

In the total stillness evoked by SHAPUR, let the Custodes wonder what is yet to come. Let their surprise or fear run wild.

Shapur keeps smiling, while the stillness is broken by the heavy steps of armed soldiers entering the room.

Exploit the uncertainty of the moment to drive the paranoia of the Custodes to their limits before defusing the situation.

Five soldiers of the Royal Guard has just entered the room, dragging along three prisoners. "Here." - says Shapur asking for the convicts to be brought along. "These persons... Greek persons... have been arrested for violating the agreement between me and the Emperor. They have been caught carrying out business beyond the stipulated boundary of Artaxata!"

While he sternly explains, SHAPUR points towards the prisoners in chains. A marginal success in *Ingenium* is sufficient to realize that the prisoners seem in good physical condition (no signs of beating or torture), although they appear also extremely scared: they all look

downward, with one of them trembling and one apparently on the verge of crying. One of the prisoners is GOLON himself. Like the others, he was arrested on false grounds in order to be used as a pawn to be traded. If the Custodes have met him in the prison they will immediately recognize him; similarly, ARISTARCUS PONTINUS will be able to identify him without difficulties. SHAPUR will then resume in a more compassionate tone.

"But, I have looked myself into their cases. And as a further token of my generosity I want to reinforce the bonds between our peoples by granting them freedom!"

After these words applauses and cheers will raise from all the corners of the table. Tellingly, the convicts will have no reaction at the news of their possible release. SHAPUR will closely look for the reaction of the Custodes, and he will be pleased if they will join the clapping or express their gratitude in a similar way. He will then impose silence one last time.

"This is my last more personal gift to you and the Emperor. These brothers of yours will be kept in high regard with us one more day, and tomorrow they will be ready to leave with you."

Although presented in terms of generosity and gift, this last twist is meant to really express the deepest intention of SHAPUR: the prisoners to be released are actually more akin to hostages which will be freed when the Custodes will leave, under the tacit assumption that they will not cause any trouble. Let this feeling sink into the player, or if necessary instill it, possibly through the comment of their guide.

The end of the banquet. The banquet will extend until midnight, when some of the *nakharar* will take their leave and retire to their apartment. The Custodes are free to hang around longer and take advantage of the more drunken noblemen in order to extract information from them. Any roll on *De Societate* may receive a bonus +d4 when trying to persuade or ingratiate the *nakharar* at the table; however, no bonus is given when dealing with SHAPUR, MOKAT or SURMAK, as their sense of caution will not be lowered by drink.

As the host of the party, SHAPUR, together with his loyal servant MOKAT, will remain for as long as the Custodes are willing to stay. It should become clear to the Custodes, however, that feasting too long may be taken as impolite overstaying, and that sometime after midnight they are expected to go.

When the Custodes decide to leave, SHAPUR will stand up to see them off:

"A magnificent night, it has been! My duties will have the best of me, but I count on seeing you again in the evening of Sunday. May the night of our beloved Armenia be restful and rejuvenating."

Outside the doors of the throne room, HERACLITUS is waiting for the Custodes in order to lead them to their apartment once again. He will take care to have them delivered to their room, and to have servants stationed at the entrance of the visitors' quarters to monitor their actions.

Inside their room, the Custodes have now the opportunity to discuss the banquet and what they have learned or inferred during it. Rely on their guide to provide them with feedback on how they behaved or on subtle signal they may have missed. Each one of them can provide the Custodes with different insights:

- LAZARUS OF ARTAXATA will be certainly willing to discuss about SURMAK. He actually met SURMAK once previously in Constantinople, where the priest used to frequent the heretic NESTORIUS. LAZARUS suspects that SURMAK may indeed also be a heretic and that he may be looking to usurp the position of *Catholicos* in order to spread his insidious ideas.
- PAHLAV RSHTUNI will comment on the selection of the guests at the banquet; he will point out that most of the NAKHARAR present seemed very favorable towards SHAPUR, and that HETUMIAN had been given a place at the table less respectable than his position would commend. PAHLAV RSHTUNI can also comment better than anyone else on the rules of etiquette and the subtle meaning of the words of SHAPUR.
- ARISTARCUS PONTINUS will reveal that one of the prisoners presented towards the end of the banquet is GOLON, a half-Greek and half-Armenian merchant he knew personally. He will also express concern about his arrest, given that the accusation of having trespassed the border of Artaxata should not apply to a merchant of Armenia descent.

All the guides will express a feeling of vague uneasiness and suspicion towards the promises of the Regent. However, they will avoid openly challenging the word of SHAPUR for fear of offending the royal majesty.

For the rest of the night, the Custodes will be free to take the initiative. If they so want, they may walk out of their room and do more investigation. This, however, would require them to evade the guards that patrol the Citadel. Also, remind them, that the night may be dark and dangerous for their safety and their reputation. If they just stay in their room, they can quietly sleep through the night. If they have grown

dubious and paranoid, they may want to take turns awake during the night; however, despite their possible fears, nothing will happen until dawn.

Dvin at night. Travelling around Dvin during the night may be challenging for the Custodes. Like many ancient cities, most of Dvin is immersed in the darkness; only a few areas around the Citadel, the Cathedral and the gates of the city are lit and are garrisoned. In neighborhoods far from these areas the Custodes may likely encounter drunkards, thugs and criminals who may think that foreigners are a good target. Most houses are locked after the sunset, and people are very careful before opening the door to strangers at night. Unexpected visits at night are often mistrusted.

The Citadel itself is patrolled at night by the Royal Guard, and is normally very quiet. *Nakharrar* mostly stay in their apartments or visit their neighbours, rarely crossing the internal courtyards or gardens. If the Custodes were to be found walking around the Citadel, they would certainly be stopped by the guards, asking them to identify themselves; moreover, if they are caught snooping around they may be escorted back to their rooms or even arrested. Any similar incident will harm the reputation of the Custodes in Dvin.

SCENE: THE SUNDAY INVESTIGATION

The day after the banquet the Custodes are once again free to roam and investigate. By now, the Custodes should be aware and suspicious of the plots undergirding the court. They may be legitimately concerned about the absence of the King and the rulership of the Regent. They may be troubled by certain statements of powerful *nakharar* like MOKAT or ARTZRUNI. They may be disturbed by the conspicuous absence of the *Catholicos* at the banquet. These (and more) hints should be enough to justify the need to perform further investigation.

At the same time, the Custodes should also have a feeling of stepping on dangerous ground: their actions may cause diplomatic accidents imperiling their mission and themselves; some of the servants and guards seem to keep a constant eye on them; and, more importantly, SHAPUR has tried to tie their hands with the promise of the release of the prisoner.

Sunday is then the time to explore those parts of the Citadel or of Dvin that they did not have the opportunity to see during the previous day (refer to *Scene: In the Citadel* and *Scene: In the City* for a description of these areas). The Custodes have a single day to figure out what is really happening at the court and take a decision on what to do before the arrival of the Parthian contingent.

The pressure of time. If the Custodes do not realize that they have a limited amount of time at their disposal, the Narrator may increase the feeling of time pressure through rumors running through the court or through the city about an impending reckoning. These rumors can be as varied and wild as possible, ranging from the suspicion that the King has been killed by one of the monsters he used to torture, to the fear that a Roman army may be on march towards Artaxata; the aim of such rumors would be just to suggest that *something big is about to happen soon*. Such a possibility should motivate the Custodes to find out more about what is going on in Dvin before it is too late.

The Sunday Service. The main event on Sunday is the service held at the Cathedral of Saint Grigor. Every week the *Catholicos* SAHAK presides the ceremony, and a large crowd of believer congregates in order to receive his blessing. Today, however, SAHAK is unable to lead the service because he is under house arrest by order of SHAPUR. In his place, the less popular SURMAK has been charged with the celebration.

Although SHAPUR has tried to spread the news that SAHAK is absent because of his state of health, the presence of guards around the Palace of the *Catholicos* has raised suspicions among

many of the faithful. A number of believers has indeed congregated outside the Cathedral, wondering what has happened to SAHAK and uncertain whether to attend the service celebrated by SURMAK.

This flock may be quite volatile and manipulable. If the Custodes have a good reputation among the citizenry of Dvin, or if they appeal to their close relationship with the Church as representative of the Greek Empire, they can easily get the attention of the crowd. A roll on *Auctoritas* may then allow them to control and direct the congregation. By rousing the crowd's spirits, the Custodes may find themselves at the lead of an angry mob, which can be directed, for instance, towards the Palace of the *Catholicos*; in such an event, the guards, feeling outnumbered, will flee back towards the Citadel. In this way, the Custodes can gain access to the Palace and to the *Catholicos* himself. Such an initiative will win the gratitude of SAHAK, but if the Custodes do not cover their role in the uprising, their position at court may be gravely compromised.

The House of Tauriz. A crucial location that the Custodes may end up exploring on Sunday is the demolished tower where ARTASHES is imprisoned. The players may decide to head there after the prompting of the *Catholicos*, after shadowing ARTZRUNI, after receiving some omen, or they may simply stumble into the location and decide to check it out.

Although the King himself is held in the basement, the demolished tower is not heavily guarded: SHAPUR and MOKAT have agreed that secrecy would be a better defense than an unusually high number of guards which would inevitably attract the attention. Between two and four soldiers oversee the entrance of the tower, with the task to prevent intruders from disturbing the peace of the House of Tauriz and from arousing the ire of the *daeva*. It should not be difficult for the Custodes to sneak past the guard or even subdue them.

Once past the guards, the Custodes will find themselves walking among the rubble of the collapsed tower. If the Custodes were to look for signs of recent passage among the debris (or if they get a complete success in an *Ingenium* skill check), they could spot footprints left by ARTZRUNI during his daily visits. By following these tracks (or, again, by scoring a complete success in an *Ingenium* skill check), they can identify a trapdoor leading to the basement of the tower.

The trapdoor opens revealing the entrance to an underground region that remind you of Hades. A ladder takes you down into the bowels of the House of Tauriz. You are surrounded by

complete darkness. The walls around you are cold and damp. The passages are narrow and broken. You can hear only the sound of the rubble kicked by your feet, and rats scurrying away at your passage.

It will be hard for the Custodes to orient themselves in the old corridors without a light. Yet the dungeon is relatively small and uninhabited and in thirty minutes the players may explore the entire complex.

The AI. To the discretion of the Narrator, one of the cells in the prison may host an AI, an Armenian mythical creature. Custodes may have heard of the presence of this creature in some dark corner of Dvin, or they may just stumble into it if they walk into the prison. Traditionally, the AI is a human-shaped demonic creature with iron fangs and claws, flaming eyes, clay nose, scruffy hair, resembling a wild hag; legends tell that an AI feeds on the organs of human beings, especially women. It is left to the Narrator how to deal with this creature. It may be a real supernatural creature captured in the wild, or it might be a hapless person who for his or her appearance has been tormented and blamed to be a monstrous creature. Similarly, it is left to the Narrator to choose if the AI may have been acquired by the King in order to satisfy his possibly vicious curiosity about exotic creatures, and to decide how the King may have related to the miserable creature, whether torturing or caring for it. Placing the AI in the House of Tauriz will add a touch of irony to the imprisonment of the King in the same place, and it may provide an explanation to the cries heard coming from the collapsed tower.

While exploring, if any Custodes is being cautious, a complete success in *Sensibilitas* will allow them to detect something:

In the dark quietness, a faint mumbling reaches your hear. Someone, or something seems to be growling or complaining from behind the wall to your right.

A metal jail door has been roughly set in the wall and closed with a old lock. Behind the door, a scared ARTASHES will be at first very surprised to see strangers, thinking that they may have been sent to kill him. As soon as he realizes that the Custodes have different intentions, he will beg them to help him escape. In confusion, he will at first just implore them, then, remembering his status, he will promise the Custodes large rewards for their assistance.

"Let me out of here! I am the King! The King of Armenia. The Emperor must have sent you! Free me and I can make you rich beyond your imagination."

Notice that ARTASHES is very nervous and afraid: he would prefer not to discuss at length while in the dungeon, but to leave his dark cell as soon as possible. Still, if asked, he will pour out words of hate towards the betrayers who jailed him:

"I will have them! I will have their heads! That snake of Shapur, Mokat and that brat of Artzruni. They will pay for this! Armenia will forget their names forever!"

Opening the cell is not too hard of a challenge. The cell door has been fitted very hastily, and a complete success in *Vigor* is enough to unhinge the door and free the King.

Alarm. If the Custodes are being followed by the servants of Shapur and have not successfully managed to lose them, any suspicious action near the House of Tauriz will be urgently reported to court, as requested by Shapur himself. Upon such a notification, a group of twenty soldiers led by Artzruni will be immediately dispatched with the order to arrest the Custodes, no matter what they will claim to have done or seen within the tower. Artzruni will not hesitate to use force to take them into custody. However, in the presence of the true king, the soldiers may heed to his word, not Artzruni's.

The arrival of the Parthian contingent. The last important event taking place on Sunday is the arrival of a large Parthian contingent. The detachment is marching towards Dvin to rendez-vous with SHAPUR, take under its custody ARTASHES, and officially appoint the Regent as the new monarch of the Armenian kingdom.

From around six in the evening, rumors will start spreading quickly and wildly that a troop of Parthian soldiers is marching towards Dvin. Apparently, the Armenian army stationed in Artaxata has not been mobilized, and now the way seems open to the capital. The locals will appear concerned but not panicky: it is their opinion that the walls of Dvin and the soldiers stationed in town could resist a siege until General MAMIKON and the King are notified of the emergency.

If unaware, let the news of the incoming army reach the ears of the Custodes about a hour before their arrival. This will set a strict countdown, and it will give the players the chance to decide what to do in the remaining time. Even if they have not learnt much about the plots at court, it should be obvious that the arrival of Parthian soldiers marks a serious change in their situation.

The danger will become even more obvious as the Parthian soldier will approach the gates of the city, and no measure will be taken by the Armenian Army or the Royal Guard to shut the doors and stop the incoming troops. On the contrary, the foreign soldiers will be welcomed by officers of the Armenian army led by ARTZRUNI.

The entrance into Dvin of the Parthian soldiers will spell the end of the mission of the Custodes. Unless they have been able to thwart the plot of SHAPUR, the players will not stand a chance on

their own to face the Parthian enemies. If the kingship is transferred to SHAPUR, this shift of power will mark a dire setback for the foreign

policy of the THEODOSIUS, as well as a dangerous change in the position of the Custodes.

EPILOGUE

The module may conclude in different ways any time during the day of Sunday. As they get to the bottom of the plots at the court, the Custodes may manage to save the Kingdom of Armenia by freeing the legitimate king, confronting the regent, or undermining SHAPUR's power through the support of local figures of power. If they fail in their political struggle, the adventure will end with the arrival of the Parthian contingent, and with the Custodes escaping the city or being handed over as prisoners to the King of Kings. A few of the possible endings are explained below.

Releasing the King. The best conclusion in the interests of the Roman Empire – and, hence, in the interests of the Custodes and the Cohors Auxiliaria Arcana – is the release and the reinstatement into power of ARTASHES. The King, immensely grateful to the Custodes for saving his life and returning him to the throne, would surely become a strong ally of the Empire; from now on, ARTASHES will antagonize the Parthian Empire that had tried to get rid of him.

If the Custodes manage to find the King and release him, the court plot orchestrated by SHAPUR and MOKAT will quickly melt away in front of the royal authority of ARTASHES. *Nakharar* that had sided with SHAPUR during the absence of the King will be quick to show their allegiance to the true crown; soldiers from the army and the Royal Guard will promptly obey the word of the King; even MOKAT may turn against the Regent in hope of saving his skin.

After the successful return to his throne, ARTASHES will offer his unconditional gratitude to the Custodes and pay them the same honours normally attributed to *nakharar*. The Parthian contingent, without the support of SHAPUR, will stop at the gates of Dvin and turn back. The Custodes will then be free to return to their homeland.

Your deeds have unravelled the deadly plot of Shapur and his Parthian allies against the Kingdom of Armenia. Your actions and your choices have renewed and strengthened the bonds between the Empire and Armenia for centuries to come. You are offered the personal friendship of the ruler, as well as a respected seat at his court. Your name will be transcribed and memorialized in the history of Movses Khorenatsi and many other scholars to follow. The Cohors Auxiliaria Arcana has proven once more its role in preserving the foundation of the Roman Empire.

Confronting the Regent. Liberating the King is not necessary to avoid the Kingdom of Armenia coming into the hands of SHAPUR and his Parthian allies. In the course of the two days they will spend in Dvin, the Custodes have the

opportunity not only to learn about the treacherous intrigues, but also to find potential allies to stop the machinations of SHAPUR.

At any time in the course of Sunday, the Custodes may decide to step into the court of Dvin and openly challenge the Regent in front of the *nakharar*. The outcome of this confrontation will depend in large measure on the support that the Custodes have been able to muster in the short time they have had. Consider how each of these parties would side between SHAPUR and the Custodes: MOKAT, ARTZRUNI, HETUMAN, SAHAK, and the group of *nakharar* at large. Refer, if useful, to the tables of *Diplomatic Factors* in the Appendix. If the Custodes can count on a majority of these parties, they can denounce the conspiracy of SHAPUR and successfully isolate him. In case of a tie, the Custodes may be required to perorate their cause (possibly with a *Auctoritas* or *De Societate* skill check) to tip the balance to their favour.

Relying on the direct support of HETUMAN or ARTZRUNI, or through the acts of the congregation of *nakharar*, SHAPUR may be imprisoned with his closest collaborator. If any of them is persuaded to confess, the King can be rescued from the House of Tauriz and his rule restored; otherwise he will die forgotten in the dungeons of the collapsed tower and a new king loyal to the Empire will be chosen. In any case, the Parthian contingent, deprived of its support, will return back to Persia. After a short time, the Custodes will be able to leave with the gratitude of the King of Armenia.

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Organizing the Resistance. Challenging SHAPUR in the court is not the only way in which the Custodes may subvert the plans of the Regent. They may, for instance, undermine his schemes by openly organizing a form of military or civil resistance. They may try to gain the support of the Armenian Army by winning the loyalty of ARTZRUNI or, more likely, appealing to the true authority of General MAMIKON; they may enlist HETUMAN and the Royal Guard to their cause; or, with the blessing of SAHAK, they may try to organize the large crowd of those believers who are afraid that the Regent is trying to silence their beloved *Catholicos* and force them to

convert to the old ways of Zoroastrianism.

The Custodes will also need a plan on how to oppose the Regent: they may march on the Royal Palace, they may surround the Citadel, or they may try to waylay the Regent. SHAPUR will promptly react to these threats counting on the troops still loyal to him, including soldiers in the Citadel or anyone obeying his orders. The success of the Custodes will depend on the number of allies they have managed to bring to their side and the ingenuity of their plan. Once again, it may be useful for the Narrator to consider how each of the main power players would side between SHAPUR and the Custodes: the Armenian Army, the Royal Guard, the Christian population, and the group of *nakharar* at large.

If the Custodes gain the upper hand before the arrival of the Parthian contingent, they may be able to capture SHAPUR or drive him to flee Dvin; in such a case, a new ruler, favourable to the Empire and Christianity, will be chosen.

Dvin has been shaken by your revolt and your actions. But that was necessary to put a stop to the treacherous plot of Shapur and his Parthian allies. After the chaos, order has been reestablished and the bonds between the Empire and Armenia renewed. The ruler is grateful for your help, and knows he owes you a debt of blood for the seat he now occupies. The price to pay has been hefty, but the Cohors Auxiliaria Arcana has proven once more its role in preserving the foundation of the Roman Empire.

However, if the revolt of the Custodes fails, they may end up prisoners of the Regent or they may be forced to escape. Critically, if the balance of strength between the forces of SHAPUR and the rebellious Custodes is even, or if the Regent manages to withstand long enough, the arrival of the Parthian contingent will very likely tip the scales in favour of SHAPUR, leading to the arrest or even the death of the Custodes.

Dvin has been shaken by your revolt and your actions. Blood has been shed, but that has not been enough to put a stop to the treacherous plot of Shapur and his Parthian allies. The dynasty of the Arsacid has reached its end, and so the influence of the Empire on the Kingdom of Armenia. A darker day rises, as, with your defeat, the Cohors Auxiliaria Arcana has failed in its sacred task of protecting the the Roman Empire.

Alternative Ending: Siding with the Regent. Even if the events in the story and the loyalty to the Cohors Auxiliaria Arcana should motivate the Custodes to act in the interest of the Empire and against the Regent, it is possible that the players might actually decide to side with Shapur. This may be dictated by various reasons: background motives, feeling of having been betrayed by the Empire, belief that Artashes is indeed an unworthy ruler, or, simply, the desire to survive and compromise with Shapur. If the Custodes were to be willing to negotiate with the Regent and support

him during the transition of power, Shapur will be more than happy to welcome them in his court. He will not be stingy in trying to bribe them: he will offer large amounts of money, aristocratic titles, a place at court – whatever the Custodes may desire within his power. After all, the change of heart of the Custodes will provide the regime of Shapur with a stronger legitimization than he ever dreamed: even the official envoys of the Greek Empire are now sanctioning him as the new King of Armenia. This turn of events may save the lives of the Custodes, and maybe even earn them an important seat at the court of Shapur first, and then maybe, at the side of the King of Kings, Vahram. However, this would also be a tragic failure for the Cohors Auxiliaria Arcana. The Custodes should feel a sense of shame or defeat at what they did, they will incur the ire of their tutelary deities, and they may even become a target for retaliation by the the Cohors Auxiliaria Arcana.

Escaping Dvin. Whenever the Custodes realize they are immersed in a thick plot, they may decide that the best solution would be to leave Dvin. Although this course of action will be certainly frowned upon by the Cohors Auxiliaria Arcana, this may be the best solution for them to save their own skins.

During the whole day of Sunday the gates of Dvin will be open as always, allowing farmers and traders to go in and out of the city. However, the guards posted at the entrance are given the order not to let the Roman ambassadors slip out of the city. This order has been given by MOKAT, who is worried that the Custodes may have already learnt too much and that they may consider informing General MAMIKON in Artaxata. The soldiers at the gate have been instructed not to rely on force if not strictly necessary: they should first inform the Custodes that the Regent wants to meet with them as soon as possible, thus convincing them to go back; if they do not accept the invitation, then the soldiers are authorized to deny them the exit and forcefully escort them to court. The order not to let them out will be renewed and reinforced after six o'clock, when the news of the approaching Parthian troops will spread; at that point, the soldiers will receive the imperative order to not let the Custodes leave the city.

However, despite these measures, the guards do not know the Custodes by sight, and the best that they can do is to stop and interrogate persons who stand out because of their somatic traits or their accent. Basic disguising, or a marginal success in *De Societate*, will be enough to evade the check and leave the city undisturbed.

Alternatively, the Custodes may also try to find an unguarded spot along the walls through which to flee. The walls presents no breaches, but because of the shape of the terrain, certain lengths of the walls are lower than others. If properly equipped, the Custodes may try to

climb the walls and escape. A marginal success in *Coordination* is enough to jump over, but not sufficient to go undetected; sentries on the wall will raise the alarm, although by the time soldiers are sent out, the Custodes may already be far away. A complete success will allow the Custodes to escape the city unseen.

As you leave the walls of Dvin to your back, columns of smoke signal that the city has fallen in the hands of Shapur. The dynasty of the Arsacid has reached its end, and so the influence of the Empire on the Kingdom of Armenia. Your effort has been in vain, but, at least, you have managed to escape alive from the traps of the royal court. A darker day rises, as, with your escape, the Cohors Auxiliaria Arcana has failed in its sacred task of protecting the the Roman Empire.

Alternative Ending: Splitting the Custodes. It is possible for the Custodes to split and pursue different solutions at the end. Especially if things turn out nasty, some of them may try to escape while others may decide to compromise and accept the offers of Shapur. Of the ones who try to leave Dvin, some of them may be stopped at the gates and be arrested, while others may manage to exit the city and return back to the Empire. The Narrator and the players should feel free to play and narrate these last events according to their imagination.

Prisoners of War. In the worst case scenario, the Custodes will be, by the end of Sunday, in the hands of SHAPUR. This may happen if the players have not managed to understand the plots running through the court and take actions to counter them.

Around six or seven, when the Parthian contingent is in view, SHAPUR will give the order to arrest the Greek ambassadors. If the Custodes are at court or in any central location of Dvin, soldiers will surround them and escort them to the prison building within the Citadel. The Custodes will be still treated with respect and honour: they will not be disarmed (after all, they are clearly outnumbered), and if they have any reasonable demands they will be satisfied. At this point, if they ask audience with SHAPUR, their request will be declined, as ordered by the Regent in person; SHAPUR considers himself victorious at this point, and, since he is going to break relations with the Empire, he has no interest in discussing with the players anymore. Convincing the guard to let them have an audience with someone else (HETUMAN, SAHAK, MOKAT...) will require a complete success in a *Auctoritas* skill check; some of these characters could help the players escape according to the relationship they have developed and granted that the Custodes may be sufficiently convincing.

Once the Parthian contingent enters the city, the Custodes will be handed over to the Parthian soldiers. Put in chains, this will mark the end of their mission. Ambassadors of the Empire are

considered prized prisoners. They will not be executed; on the contrary, they will be treated with respect and brought back to Ctesiphon. There they will be hosted at the court, waiting for the time they could be exchanged for other prisoners - or waiting for an opportunity when the Cohors Auxiliaria Arcana will be able to free them.

Under your eyes, the city has fallen into the hands of Shapur and his Parthian allies. Golden chains have been put around your wrists, as you were handed over to the Parthian soldiers, already bent on marching back to Persia. The dynasty of the Arsacid has reached its end, and so the influence of the Empire on the Kingdom of Armenia. As you march towards Ctesiphon, you realize your effort has been in vain. A darker day rises, as, with your escape, the Cohors Auxiliaria Arcana has failed in its sacred task of protecting the the Roman Empire.

Odyssey back to the Empire. In the same way the events on the road from Antioch to Dvin were left to the Narrator and the players, so, in case of an escape from Dvin or from their Parthian jailers, the challenges and the difficulties of the way back may become the object of further role-playing. The Custodes may have to avoid the main thoroughfares where agents of Shapur may be looking for them and have to follow old trails across remote regions until they can make it back to the Empire or get back in touch with other soldiers of the Cohors Auxiliaria Arcana. During these detours the Custodes may end up in dangerous and unexplored areas that may offer good locations for new adventures.

DISCLAIMERS, REFERENCES AND SOURCES OF INSPIRATION

The setting has taken inspiration mainly from:

- Giusto Traina, *428 dopo Cristo, Storia di un Anno*, Editori Laterza, 2017.
- The description of the *AI* creature follows the description provided on Wikipedia ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al_\(folklore\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al_(folklore))), taken from Asatrian, Garnik. "AI Reconsidered". *Iran and the Caucasus* 5.1 (2001): 149-156.

Finally all the characters and their relationships are purely fictional.

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- *Cover art*: *Fantasy of an Ancient Bath (detail)* by Giovanni Battista Piranesi (author), licensed under CC0 1.0, retrieved at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Giovanni_Battista_Piranesi,

CHARACTERS

This section provides a quick summary of all the characters in the module. A star denotes real historical characters, as contrasted to fictional characters created for the sake of the adventure. An underlining denotes characters that actually appear in the module, as contrasted to characters that are present only in the background.

EMPIRE

- ***THEODOSIUS II** (lived 401-450) Roman Emperor of the East.
- ***VALENTINIAN III** (lived 419-455) Roman Emperor of the West. Colleague of THEODOSIUS II.
- ***GALLA PLACIDIA** (died 450) Mother of THEODOSIUS II.
- ***PULCHERIA** Sister of THEODOSIUS II.
- ***EUDOCIA** (lived 401-460) Wife of THEODOSIUS II.
- ***NESTORIUS** (lived 386-451) Clergyman.
- ***HYPATHIUS** (died 450) Clergyman.
- ***AETIUS** (lived 390-454) Roman General.
- ***BONIFACIUS** (died 432) Roman General.
- ***FLAVIUS DYONISUS** *Magister utriusque militiae per Orientem*, supreme commander of the army on the Eastern front, and member of the Cohors Auxiliaria Arcana.
- LAZARUS OF ARTAXATA** Christian monk and potential guide.
- PAHLAV RSHTUNI** Armenian *nakharar* and potential guide.
- ARISTARCUS PONTINUS** Greek merchant and potential guide.
- GAIUS NASUS** Half-Greek, half-Armenian merchant stationed in Dvin under the name GOLON. Contact and informer for the Roman Empire.

ARMENIA

- ***TIRIDATES III** (ruled 298-330) Former Armenian king. During his rule, Armenia converted to Christianity.
- ***SAINT GREGORY THE ILLUMINATOR** (lived 257-331) Founder of the Armenian Apostolic Church. He converted Tiridates III to Christianity.

***KHOSROV III KOTAK** (ruled 330-339) Former Armenian king. He founded the capital of Dvin.

***MESROP MASHTOTS** (lived 362-440) Scholar and theologian of the Armenian Apostolic Church. Creator of the Armenia alphabet.

* **VRAMSHAPUH** (lived 340-414) Former Armenian king from 389 to 414. Father of ARTASHES IV.

***ARTASHES IV** (lived 404-430) Current Armenian king of Arsacid descent.

***VARDAN MAMIKON** *Nakharar*. General of the Armenian army currently stationed in Artaxata. Loyal to the king.

***VEH MIHR SHAPUR** *Nakharar*. Leader of the nobles plotting to dethrone ARTASHES IV and reunite Armenia with the Parthian Empire.

***SAHAK** *Catholicos*. Leader of the Armenian Apostolic Church and supporter of ARTASHES IV.

***SURMAK** Priest of the Armenian Apostolic Church and supporter of VEH MIHR SHAPUR.

ZARMIR HETUMAN *Nakharar*. Leader of cataphracts in the Royal Guard. Obedient to authority, loyal to ARTASHES IV.

MJEJ ARTZRUNI *Nakharar*. Young officer. Supporter of VEH MIHR SHAPUR.

CHIHOR MOKAT *Nakharar*. Politician. Supporter of VEH MIHR SHAPUR.

ADHUR RSHTUNI/ATRZRUNI *Nakharar*. Supporter of ARTASHES IV.

GOLON see GAIUS NASUS.

HERACLITUS servant of VEH MIHR SHAPUR and teacher of MJEJ ARTZRUNI.

ADARBAD servant of CHIHOR MOKAR and carer of the Zoroastrian altar.

***MOVSES KHORENATSI** (lived 410-490) Armenian historian.

PARTHIA

***VAHRAM V** (lived 406-438) King of Kings of Parthia. Of Sasanian descent.

TIMELINE

The year is 428 AD. The season early May.

- **Day -9: Wednesday (flashback)**
 - Meeting with FLAVIUS DYONISUS in the night.
- **Day -8: Thursday**
 - Departure for Dvin.
- **Day -3: Tuesday**
 - News of the arriving Greek delegation reaches Dvin.
- **Day -2: Wednesday**
 - Abduction of the King in the night.
- **Day -1: Thursday**
 - Arrest of GOLON.
- **Day 0: Friday**
 - House arrest of SAHAK.
- **Day 1: Saturday (start of the module).**
 - Arrival in Dvin in the early afternoon.
 - Meeting with the regent
 - Initial part of investigation in the afternoon.
 - Banquet in the evening.
- **Day 2: Sunday.**
 - Cancelled service in the morning.
 - Main part of investigation during the day.
 - Arrival of the Parthian contingent in the evening.

FACTIONS

Two main factions compete for power in the court of Dvin:

1. The *coup faction*. This is a tight faction of *nakharar* centered around SHAPUR. They are trying to remove the current King ARTASHES and elevate SHAPUR to the throne. The members share strong Parthian sympathies and Zoroastrian faith; they believe their cultural roots and heritage lie to the South East with the Parthian King of Kings, and they view the Roman Empire as an intruding power. Also, many of them consider ARTASHES unfit, for political and moral reasons, to be the King of Armenia. The political scheming mind of the group is MOKAT. ARTZRUNI, with his command over the Armenian army, represents the armed wing of the group. The corrupt priest SURMAK provides a Christian facade to the faction. Other characters involved in the conspiracy include the servant HERACLITUS and a number of *nakharar* at court.
2. The *royal faction*. This is a loose faction of people still loyal to King ARTASHES. The members do not form a cohesive group, but

they have in common a conservative outlook concerned with preserving the *status quo*, including the current King, the allegiance to Rome and open policies towards the Armenian Church; members of this party may be brought closer together as the events in the story unfold. The faction includes the current *Catholicos* SAHAK; the head of the Royal Guard HETUMIAN; the absent general MAMIKON; the mercant GOLON working under cover for the Roman Empire.

STORYLINE FOR THE GUIDES

Each one of the three guides that the Custodes may have chosen to take with them has a different back-story and may help the players in various ways:

- **LAZARUS OF ARTAXATA:** originally from Artaxata, LAZARUS left Armenia more than twenty years ago to study theology in Constantinople. He preached in the capital of the Roman Empire, before moving to Edessa and taking charge of a local Armenian community. LAZARUS could easily help the Custodes deal with the Armenian church and its rituals (e.g.: identifying the klobuk); he can also provide them with information about the *Catholicos* SAHAK and about SURMAK. It is likely that LAZARUS may end up in a theological debate with SURMAK and earns his enmity.
- **PAHLAV RSHTUNI:** a *nakharar* from one of the most important families in Armenia, PAHLAV was educated in Artaxata, and then about twenty years ago he traveled to the Eastern Roman Empire, initially on an official embassy to Constantinople, then on his own pursuing learning in philosophy and politics. Given his upbringing, PAHLAV is very knowledgeable about court etiquette and protocols, and he can easily instruct the Custodes. Unfortunately, because of his long absence, he is not up to date with the last intrigues in the court. In particular he is not aware that his own family, very loyal to the King, has been cast out from the capital in the last year through the machinations of MOKAT. MOKAT is the only *nakharar* old and attentive enough to recognize in PAHLAV a member of the Rshtuni family and to target him.
- **ARISTARCUS PONTINUS:** a Greek merchant who has travelled very frequently between the Roman Empire and Artaxata. Although he has never been to Dvin because of the legal restriction imposed on Roman merchants, ARISTARCUS knows Armenian culture very well,

and he is the only guide who has had the opportunity to learn the new Armenian alphabet recently created by MESROP MASHTOTS. ARISTARCUS has had contacts with many merchants in his career, and he can recognize GOLON and the other merchants arrested by SHAPUR.

DIPLOMATIC FACTORS

Court etiquette in Dvin, as in other courts, is a complicated matter. A right or wrong move may easily influence the mood and the opinion of the ruler and the courtesans, making it easier or harder to obtain the desired information or favours; in the worst case, what may appear as an open offense or a grave violation of the protocol may result in a breakdown of talks, the stripping of any ambassadorial right bestowed upon the Custodes, and an arrest. This would of course spell the failure of the mission assigned to the players.

Although the mood of SHAPUR and his court should always be judged by the Narrator in a holistic way, here is a selection of sample actions and conditions that may affect these relationships positively or negatively.

INFLUENCE ON ARMENIAN PEOPLE

Positive Factors

Speaking in Armenian

Showing knowledge of Armenian culture

Behaving properly inside the Cathedral

Respecting and helping the *Catholicos*

Negative Factors

Assuming the superiority of Greek culture

Discounting Parthian cultural connections

Treating the Armenian Church as secondary

INFLUENCE ON THE NAKHARAR

Positive Factors

Speaking in Armenian

Showing knowledge of Armenian nobility

Referencing Moses of Khores

Spending time in the gardens of the Royal Palace

Outsmarting Mokat in a public debate

Showing interest in the tale of Esfandiyar

Rolling successes on their *Auctoritas*

Negative Factors

Assuming the superiority of Greek culture

Discounting Parthian history

Behaving improperly in the gardens (e.g.: eavesdropping)

Being embarrassed by Mokat

Being often in the company of Pahlav Rshtuni

Breaking protocols at court

INFLUENCE ON HETUMIAN

Positive Factors

- Speaking in Armenian
- Properly introducing themselves
- Delivering the greetings of the Emperor
- Outsmarting Mokat in a public debate
- Trying to include him in the discussions at the banquet

Negative Factors

- Trying to pry too much into Armenian politics
- Disrespecting the soldiers of the Royal Guard
- Openly befriending Mokat
- Being caught behaving suspiciously in the Citadel
- Being caught around the Citadel at night

INFLUENCE ON SHAPUR

Positive Factors

- Speaking in Armenian
- Using the right titles
- Showing respect to the court
- Bowing to Shapur or calling him King
- Delivering the gifts
- Expressing gratitude for the release of the prisoners

Negative Factors

- Refusing the food offered
- Demanding insistently information about Artashes
- Not paying him enough attention
- Snubbing him in favor of other courtiers
- Not recognizing his authority
- Insisting on the rights of Christianity
- Overstaying at the banquet
- Stirring up problems with the *Catholicos*

INFLUENCE ON MOKAT

Positive Factors

- Speaking in Armenian
- Asking for his advice
- Taking his counsel before Artzruni's
- Behaving properly during the banquet

Negative Factors

- Contradicting or outsmarting him
- Making displays of force
- Getting involved in Armenian politics
- Eavesdropping on his conversations in the garden
- Being accompanied by Pahlav Rshtuni
- Befriending Hetumian
- Overstaying at the banquet
- Stirring up problems with the *Catholicos*

INFLUENCE ON ARTZRUNI

Positive Factors

- Being assertive
- Showing a certain disdain of politics

Negative Factors

- Favoring the Royal Guard over the army
- Following him
- Asking too many questions
- Being caught around the Citadel at night

MAPS



Figure 1: Central area of Dvin - Citadel, Royal Palace, city walls, Cathedral and Palace of the Catholicos. Original Image: *The City of Dvin* by armenica.org, licensed under CC BY-SA 3.0, retrieved at https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:The_City_of_Dvin.gif



Figure 2: Areas within the Royal Palace.