

WHO

FUN FACT:

Mithridates cultivated immunity to poisons by regularly ingesting non-lethal doses of poison, a practice that is now known to as "mithridatism".

A coin representing the King of Pontus, Mithridates VI. Circa 120-63 BCE. Minted in Pergamon. Dated month 12, year 223 BE (September 74 BCE). Classical Numismatic Group, Inc. *Creative Commons*.

WHO WAS MITHRIDATES?

Mithridates VI was the King of Pontus between 120-63 BCE. Pontus was a region of the Greek Empire along the Black Sea in what is modern-day Turkey. Mithridates VI is regarded as a strong ruler, having won many battles against the Romans, defending and expanding his kingdom substantially during his reign. He was of both Iranian and Greek ancestry and his name is derived from that of the ancient Iranian sun god, Mithra.

When Mithridates VI was just a boy, his father, Mithridates V, was poisoned. The king's sons were not old enough to take over, so his mother reigned as regent. She favored Mithridates VI's brother to take the throne and plotted to ensure his ascension by any means necessary, so Mithridates VI went into hiding. He emerged years later once he'd come of age

and took the throne from his brother and mother, imprisoning them both. He married his youngest sister to preserve the purity of his bloodline. He then embarked on a series of wars to expand his kingdom. These wars lasted decades and are known as the Mithridatic Wars. They involved not only battles, but also strategic marriages to secure alliances.

Mithridates VI had six wives, several mistresses and concubines, and fathered over two dozen children. After one of his sons rebelled and joined his adversaries, defeating him in battle, Mithridates poisoned his wives and daughters and then committed suicide.

Mithridates VI's life is immortalized in two operas, as well as several poems, songs, and novels.

REFLECT:

If you were writing an opera about a historical ruler, who would you choose and why?



A Swiss coin depicting the suicide of Mithridates designed and minted by Jean Dasser & Sons, 1740-1750. Classical Numismatic Group, Inc. [Creative Commons](#).