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## **Rome and Parthia: Power Politics and Diplomacy Across Cultural Frontiers**

*By Dr R. James Ferguson*

### **Parthians and Persians: The Horizon of Hellenistic and Roman Power**

Modern international relations, though still focused in part on issues of power and power balance, has in recent years been forced to assess a wide range of religious, economic and cultural factors that cross boundaries and form deep linkages among social systems that are transnational in nature.(1) This problem is prominent where national or imperial frontiers expand across areas still linked by trade, religious affiliation, and migration flows, and where the patterns of diplomacy and war themselves form transboundary linkages. Such frontiers were enduring problems that focused the attentions of major civilisations for centuries, e.g. China with its complex frontier-relations to the west and north-west (followed by a sense of vulnerability to European naval power from the south-east, at first via the South China Sea), Russia's historical obsession with an expanding eastern frontier, and European concern about the power, influence and later instability of the Ottoman Empire. This problem was also found in the Graeco-Roman world, whose interaction with Persia formed one of the great 'east-west' dichotomies in European thought. If not exactly 'transnational', since modern nation-states had not yet been formed, such 'trans-imperial' patterns complicated the creation of stable borders, undermined power-balancing, and reduced the mutual acceptance of zones for cultural and religious interaction. Indeed, it seems likely that 'notions of state, territory and boundary' had developed to a substantial degree in Imperial Rome and Sasanid Persia, shaping complex regional interactions during both war and peace.(2)

Persia and Parthia were two of the great 'others' that shaped the limits of the Graeco-Roman world,(3) and were also imagined worlds where European values were explored, excluded, and projected. 'Persia' invokes a thousand images derived from school textbooks and old movies, most often the image of a huge, slave-based empire that sought to crush the freedom of Athens and the bravery of Sparta. A corrupt despotism that was overthrown by the heroic (if murderous) Alexander the Great. A medieval court replete with viziers and the pomp and ceremony of the east. A declining power engaged with Russia and England in the Great Game of imperial competition and espionage.(4) More recently, a vital region for later European diplomatic, energy and security interests, including a role in the new 'Great Game' based on access to oil and gas, both in the Persian Gulf area and the Caspian Sea.(5)

'Parthia' invokes much less: usually a null result from many public databases and one or two dated books in local library catalogues. With the exception of academic writing, mainly on the 'Roman east', the memory of this extended empire in the English speaking world is usually encapsulated in one vaguely remembered phrase: 'the Parthian shot', the surprise tactic that the fleeing horse-archer makes when he turns and shoots back over his shoulder against an over-confident pursuer.(6) More generally it suggests a strategic retreat followed by a devastating counter-attack. We might replace these images with two themes: Parthian power and Persian elegance. Parthia emerged both as the inheritor of early

Middle Eastern influences and as the limit of Roman power in the east. It was a strategic and cultural counterbalance whose significance has been underestimated in the Graeco-Roman-centric tendencies of European historiography.

There has been a tendency by modern academics to view Parthia and Rome during the mid-first century B.C. as emerging superpowers: -

Thus, with power, prestige, wealth - and hurt pride it was a new Iran that faced Rome. Two brand new superpowers flexing their outward muscles, one claiming the mantle of Alexander, the other the mantle of Cyrus, both meeting face-to-face at the Euphrates which formed their border.(7)

Under pressure even the Romans might pessimistically view the Parthians as a power 'rivalling imperial Rome itself'.(8) Indeed, the 'Parthian empire was the only other highly organized political system known to the Romans, and the Parthians came to be viewed as archetypal "rivals" of the Romans'.(9) From this perspective, their long conflict might be seen as necessary in terms of geo-political competition, but ultimately futile, as suggested by Robert Browning: -

Neither empire could hope to destroy the other militarily. Their centres of power were too distant, in the Mediterranean basin and the high plateau of Iran respectively. Yet for century after century Roman and Persian armies fought one another in the bleak hills of Armenia and on the parched plains of Mesopotamia. The best outcome that could be hoped for was a minor rectification of the frontier. In a sense it was one of the stupidest wars in history. Yet it had its rationale. Neither power could afford, for economic as much as for strategic reasons, to let the other dominate the disputed zones of Armenia and Mesopotamia. What they fought for was prestige, to show the Armenians and above all the Aramaic peoples which of them was 'top nation'.(10)

These views may be slightly exaggerated. Rome with difficulty established strong northern borders that would only partially stabilise its relations with Gallic, German and trans-Danubian tribes,(11) while Parthia always had to contend with the fluid movement of peoples across Central Asia. Thus, Rome and Parthia emerged as central powers within a wider landscape of states, kingdoms and tribes that stretched from Britain to China. Parthia, in particular, had a complex task in negotiating power relations to its east and north, including the conquest of the Kushans, deflecting the invading Alani and Huns, and forging positive diplomatic relations with China.(12)

Yet the Persians and Parthians did form part of an entrenched cultural frontier in terms of perceptions and literary types. From the time of Homeric literature onwards mental and cultural barriers were established as part of the emerging identity of those who would later on be claimed as quintessential Europeans: the Greeks and the Romans. Greece was a collection of communities on the mainland the Aegean, and there, east across the wine-dark seas was Troy, and far to the south Phoenicia and Egypt. In time the horizon was shifted further east to the suddenly risen empire of Persia that had swallowed Media, Babylon, Assyria, Lydia and thereafter all of the Middle East. The Achaemenids cast a huge shadow across Jewish and Biblical traditions, as well as forming a key protagonist for the Hellenic world. The Trojan and Persian wars would form dominant literary types that shaped propaganda and history in subsequent Hellenistic and Roman periods.(14) Thus: "Not only were the Persian Wars seen as a rerun of the Trojan, Alexander's was too."(14)

However, the Greek horizon was circumscribed by more than rumour, imagination and warfare. It was also shaped by direct contact via exploration, trade, diplomacy and colonisation. The eastern 'frontier' would be moved east as colonies were established in Asia Minor, making the Aegean a Greek Sea, followed by colonies in the Black Sea, and scattered to a lesser degree through much of the eastern and central Mediterranean. The Greeks encountered kingdoms in Asia Minor, diverse barbarian groups on the fringes of Black Sea (Scythians and later on Celts), and knew of the ancient wonders of Egypt. But the great 'oppositional' other to the east that would shape their sense of history was the Persia of the Achaemenids, which during the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. threatened to absorb not just Asia Minor but all of the Aegean and mainland Greece. Most Europeans have received the stories of heroic Spartans and robust Athenians, turning back the Persian hoards. These images have become

fables and movie themes, vaguely known even by those that read little. It now forms the focus of television documentaries that explicate, via animated graphics, on the way the Persians underestimated Greek hoplites. Through this medium we now see the heroic defence at Marathon, the Spartans who died at Thermopylae, and the 'wooden wall' of ships that would smash the Persian fleet almost within sight of Athens (the naval battle at Salamis).(15)

In Greek accounts, eventual defeat of the Persians in mainland Greece was seen as partly due to their sacrilegious destruction of Athenian temples, and the willingness of Xerxes to be influenced against his better judgement by a dream, presumably sent by the gods to force him into a hubristic war which allowed fate to be unravelled.(16) It was these types of considerations which made Xerxes an ideal person to be chosen as an example of Asian despotism and excessive hubris in Aeschylus' play *The Persians*.(17) It was his arrogance in attacking Greece, most of all, that set him against the limits appointed by the gods.(18) Beyond this, the east was a source of wealth, booty, territorial expansion, and of power based on military resources, taxes and hegemonic control of 'nations' and cities, a key realist motive for aggressive wars waged by Greeks, Macedonians and Romans.(19)

However, the knowledge, diplomacy and motivations of those who fought these wars were also shaped by religious, literary and cultural factors. In these world views, epitomised by Herodotus and Thucydides and known to every English school child in the first half of the 20<sup>st</sup> century, those who Medized (went over to the Persians) were the great collaborators, traitors to the Hellenic ideal. In reality, this included many states in Asia Minor and the far north that had to face the brunt of superior Persian land and naval forces, including much of Northern Greece and Boeotia. Thebes above all was held up for this disdain, an insult that would later be thrown at it by the young Alexander as he sought to retain Macedonian hegemony by the utter destruction of the rebellious city as an example to others. (20)

Beyond these stereotypes, however, there was a more complex legacy of Persian civil and military power. Alongside its authoritarian and ruthless side, there were positive elements in the Persian empire as a zone of relative stability and partial tolerance. Its levels of taxation were relatively light, it created a zone of partial peace in which trade and cultural diffusion flourished, and during its early period it was not interested in forcing its religion on non-Iranians, allowing high levels of religious freedom in Babylon, Jerusalem and, initially, in Egypt.(21) Its empire had some cosmopolitan features, with Aramaic being used as a *lingua franca*, and strong artistic borrowings from Greek artisans that mingled with Iranian patterns of architecture.(22) Furthermore, from the end of the Persian Wars until the conquests of Alexander, the King of Persia played an important balancing role in Greek affairs, acting to influence power relations throughout the region.(23) It was during this period that there was some acculturation between the Persian and Greek spheres of influence, particularly in the eastern Aegean.(24) By the late fourth century B.C. there was a considerable degree of contact and mutual awareness between the Greek and Persian cultures, and between Macedonian and Persian court systems.(25)

It was under Alexander the Great that the view of Persia as the great enemy was once again resurrected, a unifying focus for Macedonian ambitions and by the nominal demand for revenge for the past Persian burning of Greek temples.(26) Later on, Polybius would recount the Persians as rich and decadent, a people whose 'cowardice and indolence' made them fit for Macedonian conquest.(27) The account of Arrian shows us an ambitious but brilliant Alexander defeating a tragic but flawed Persian king, then 'inheriting' his empire. Alexander in the modern period is sometimes presented as the carrier of Greek culture eastwards and the creator of a civilising Hellenistic empire.(28) If true, he was also a destroyer, wiping out cities that opposed him too fiercely, and possibly, the intentional destroyer of the artistic glory of Persepolis.(29)

Indeed, some Persians and Iranian sources view Alexander as a barbarian destroyer of culture, rather than as the spreader of a proud Hellenism.(30) Indeed, the Sasanian 'propaganda' tended to dismiss the earlier Arsacid dynasty as a disastrous period based on Alexander's humiliating intervention.(31) Thus: -

The shadow of Alexander always lay heavily on all who had felt it. For the Iranians, it had haunted their consciousness for a millennium as a constant reminder of their humiliating defeat by an invader whose victory the Iranians had looked upon more than any other single event as the source of their misfortunes, as well as their grievances and rage towards the West.(32)

However, recent analysis has suggested that for a time Alexander also sought to mobilise the Iranian peoples as an important third tier, standing alongside Macedonians and Greeks as a group whose skills were needed to help administer his empire. Though not a genuine fusion policy,(34) it was at least a pragmatic recognition of the talents of the Iranians and Medes who had controlled much of the Near East. This led to two parallel traditions in Iran's national history: -

According to genuine Iranian tradition, Alexander destroyed the integrity of the Iranian empire by undermining the authority of its kings and dividing the land among feudatory lords. Further, he ruined fire temples, killed Zoroastrian priests and destroyed their manuscripts, transferring Persian science and philosophy to Rum (Greece). On the other hand, the legendary tale of Alexander, written by pseudo-Callisthenes sometime before the 4<sup>th</sup> century, was translated into Middle Persian during the 6<sup>th</sup> century, and its content, with some modifications, was later adopted into the body of Iranian historical traditions. In the Iranian form of the romance, Alexander becomes a son of Dara I and a half brother of his adversary, Dara II.(35)

Likewise, in the Persian accounts such as the *Shah-nama* (2696), those who had supported Alexander are portrayed negatively, while 'The Letter of Tansar' King Adashir asserts his desire to fight the Rumis (at this stage the Greeks, i.e. 'the people of Alexander') and avenge Dara.(36) Alexander is thus represented on the one hand as a legitimate successor fit to revenge the death of Darius III (by modern reckoning, perhaps to be linked with Dara II in the Iranian national histories), on the other hand as a tyrant, an evil king of 'foreign blood'.(37) The effort to legitimate Alexander as, in some sense, Persian is also found in the myth that he was in fact the unrecognised son of Dara I and the 'daughter of Rum' who had been sent back to her homeland, a story that had been translated in Middle Persian, Syriac and Arabic.(38) In medieval Persian poetry the Romans survived as the *Rum*, 'merely a stock image for the exotic, for distance, for the barbaric, occasionally for mystery'.(39)

These images have been dealt with in detail by modern revisionist historians,(40) since both the Persian Wars and the Age of Alexander are virtual founding 'myths' in the traditional accounts of European cultural and political history.(41) Less explored and certainly less prominent in the public imagination is the later role of other great empires in the east, especially the Parthian and later Persian dynasties, beginning with the Sasanid house of Iran from circa AD 226(42), that would both challenge and counterbalance Roman power in the Middle East. This interaction would have a profound influence on the political realities and culture of the Roman and Byzantine Empire, thereby adding an important thread that needs to be followed. Furthermore, as we shall see, these Parthian and later Persian domains were themselves influenced by Hellenistic culture, and were the repository of Greek learning that would prepare the ground for the later flourishing of Islamic scholarship, medicine and science.(43)

Parthia, moreover, became the great balancing and contending power for Rome in the East, while from the late Middle Ages on into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Persia was an exotic domain intoxicating the European imagination. As the emerging modern state of Iran, it would also be subject to the pressures of the Great Game played out between Russia and England, and then to the harsh realities of a weakening power buffered by the forces of imperialism and neo-colonialism. The current 'Iranian threat' mythology, played out in particular by both the U.S. administration and to a lesser extent Saudi Arabia, still contains echoes of this imagery of a dangerous and savage 'other' which cannot be viewed as a normal state, in spite of some reform efforts.(44) As part of President Bush's 'axis of evil', as a potential nuclear power, and as a state with strong 'theocratic' restraints that limit the democratic process,(45) it remains a focus of threat perceptions and historical projections that may undermine positive public diplomacy.

## **Parthia in Mind**

Parthia established itself as an independent region by breaking away from the Seleucid Kingdom in the third century B.C. (circa 250-238 B.C.), with the Arsacids defeating an independent satrap, probably Andragoras, by 238 B.C.(46) Thereafter the Parthians fought to become a locus of independent power as the strength of the Seleucid kingdom fluctuated. This was based on the vigorous action of Arsaces I in invading Parthia (from adjacent northern regions) as satrapal control wavered, when Seleucus II was engaged in war with his half brother Antiochus Hierax, and then in the following Third Syrian War.(47) Parthia was further established by the following military policies of Arsaces I and Arsaces II.(48) Nominal control was reasserted by Antiochus III the Great,(49) when once again the Parthians were for a short time viewed as vassals, but this could not be sustained and Parthian control of adjacent regions began to create what can be legitimately viewed as an empire. (50) The last attempt by the Seleucids to reassert control of Media and eastern territories (circa 129 B.C., under Antiochus VII) failed, leaving Parthia the major power in abutting the Hellenistic kingdoms.(51) Thus, 'the Hellenistic landscape of the Further East was transformed and the history of Seleucid decline over the eastern Iranian plateau became as much a part of the history of Central Asia and India, as it did of the history of Hellenism'.(52) Like Persia before it, Parthia became the controlling focus of the region interposed between the Hellenistic world and the great cultural systems of India, Central Asia and China.

The Parthians are first heard of in the sixth century B.C. in the Behistun Inscription as the 'Parthava', 'Parthva' or 'Parthwa' people, who had taken part in the widespread revolts of the time, but thereafter are recorded as peaceful subjects of the Achæmenian period, 515-331 B.C. (53) Probably of Scythian origin (the Parni tribe), the Parthians were influenced by east Iranian language, political traditions and dress habits, but might only generally be classified as 'Iranians'.(54) It is probable that those known to us as the Parni were part of the more extensive Dahae confederation, and that they had moved into the eastern fringes of the Caspian Sea ('northern Parthia') during the early third century B.C.(55)

They were known as skilled nomadic horseman, with this view taken up with some relish by George Rawlinson, a late 19<sup>th</sup> century historian: -

Like the Turkoman and Tâtar tribes generally, they passed almost their whole lives on horseback, conversing, transacting business, buying and selling, even eating, while mounted on their horses. They practised polygamy, secluded their women from the sight of men, punished unfaithfulness with extreme severity, delighted in hunting, and rarely ate any flesh but that which they obtained in this way, were moderate eaters but great drinkers, did not speak much, but yet were very unquiet, being constantly engaged in stirring up trouble either abroad or at home.(56)

The stereotypes are continued in Rawlinson's account of Parthian motivations: -

But in Parthia Greek rule was from the first cast aside. The native Asiatics rebelled against their masters. A people of a rude and uncivilised type, coarse and savage, but brave and freedom-loving, rose up against the polished but comparatively effeminate Greeks, who held them in subjection, and claimed and succeeded in establishing their independence. The Parthian kingdom was thoroughly anti-Hellenic. It appealed to patriotic feelings, and to the hate universally felt towards the stranger. It set itself to undo the work of Alexander, to cast out the Europeans, to recover for the native race the possession of its own continent. "Asia for the Asiatics," was its cry. (57)

It was also claimed that 'they combined great military prowess and vigour with a capacity for organisation and government', but they never to 'any extent amalgamated with the subject peoples, but continued for centuries an exclusive dominant race, encamped in the countries which they had overrun'.(58) Similar value judgements of the Parthians go back at least as far as Strabo, who in describing them as Scythians and barbarians was supporting the Graeco-Roman view of nomads as inherently less civilized than farmer-based communities.(59) Strabo lumps the Parthians in with other barbarians (such as the Celts) who practised 'guerilla warfare'.(60) For Ammianus Marcellinus, the Parthians were 'savage and warlike', though he recognised that Persia had authentic divination methods and an 'uncorrupted cult of the divine'.(61) These views led to a some underestimation of the Parthians (and related peoples), and contributed directly to the later defeats of Roman commanders

such as Crassus and Mark Antony (62). The Graeco-Roman view, which tended to colour early European accounts, provided embedded motifs that drove forward a set of 'recurring images' concerning an 'Eastern' other: 'degeneracy, despotism, cruelty, treachery, instability, weakness', all ways of cloaking 'a feared and powerful foe'.(63) Ammianus Marcellinus' historical account of the fourth century A.D., for example, abounds with common place stereotypes of the cruelty of the Persian king, who ruled through fear and terror, only at times masked by pretences of 'mildness'.(64)

For ideological and pragmatic reasons as well, Parthian studies were overshadowed by other areas of modern academic study: -

An unwarrantedly negative and suspicious attitude towards the Parthians appears strangely widespread among scholars, with whom the Parthians, at bottom, have never been popular: in the case of the Iranists, because of the absence, perhaps, of adequate historical sources originating from the Parthian empire that might have engaged their attention by providing sound evidence of the specifically Iranian cultural conceptions of the Arsacids and of the continuity of these conceptions between the Achaemenids and the Sasanids; in the case of the archaeologists, because of the heterogeneity, perhaps, of the culture of the countries of the Parthian empire, though such a view overlooks the fact that precisely this heterogeneity is one of the reasons for the cultural greatness and vitality of this empire.(65)

The Parthians tried to limit Greek and Hellenistic influence politically, for example in their choice of major centres and capitals (Dara, Arsak, Hecatompylus, Ctesiphon, Old and New Nisa, Vologasias), e.g. Ctesiphon was probably born as a major military camp across the Tigris River from the Hellenistic commercial city of Seleucia.(66) However, contra early stereotypes, they could not help but be influenced by Hellenistic practices.(67) Thus their coinage initially took on Seleucid types, and Mithridates I 'as earnest of his goodwill towards the Greek communities scattered throughout his new kingdom he introduced on his coinage that of *Philheliene*', indicating one who was a friend of Greeks and Greek culture.(68) Artistic styles in sculpture and architecture were strongly influenced by Hellenistic forms, though there are also architectural details that go back to earlier Achaemenid sources, even if little detailed knowledge of Achaemenid political ideology survived into the Parthian period.(69) Parthian art was noted for its fine metal work, including animal forms influenced in part by Iranian styles.(70) Ironically, as Seleucid political control of Parthia slipped away, Arsacid Parthia 'increasingly assimilated with Hellenistic and later Roman culture'.(71)

However, in the long term, Parthian art created a complex and diverse legacy in its own right, even as it drew on diverse regional traditions. Sasanian music would also become part of the bedrock of classical music in the Near East, with strong influence on later Persian, Armenian, Georgian and Arabian styles.(72) Likewise, Parthian minstrels (*gosan* or *gusan*) laid a foundation of romantic and heroic tales that would find reflection in later Persian literature,(73) as well as in the bards and minstrels that could still be found in parts of Turkey, Iran, Armenia and Georgia down till the 20<sup>th</sup> century.(74)

The Parthians ruled a diverse but loosely organised empire in which they both transmitted and adapted a wide range of cultural traditions. Furthermore, Parthia 'was a large kingdom with a long and distinctive tradition of civilization, coherent government, and domination over subject peoples' for over four hundred years.(75) As such, they were more than warriors and 'barbarians', and carried patterns of governance, economy and society that have yet to be adequately appreciated in generalised accounts of world history. The very lack of tight centralisation allowed some level of local autonomy (using a system of inner satrapies and partially autonomous 'peripheral dependent states'), and encouraged some degree of religious tolerance and local syncretism, though the Parthians in the main were probably Zoroastrians.(76)

### **Roman Relationships with Parthia: Lucullus to Septimius Severus**

Parthia became a major issue for Roman policy virtually as soon as Rome inherited direct interests in Greece and Asia Minor, i.e. by the 1st century B.C. In effect, the Parthians came to dominate the



lands viewed by the Romans as 'beyond' the Euphrates River, with so many countries and tribes under their control that they became 'rivals' with Rome, largely due to Parthian successes in warfare.(77) Indeed, the control of the East and the Parthian threat became one of the 'grand preoccupations' of Roman policy, even if no grand strategy could be successfully hammered out to finally end this menace.(78) Nor would repeated treaties and an emerging diplomacy of accommodation forge a permanent peace. These tensions were driven by the internal politics of leadership in Rome, and in part due to the sense of openness and vulnerability of Syria, with the Euphrates River not being a strong physical barrier and at best a problematic frontier.(79)

However, this period of contact and accommodation was a drawn out process, and during first century B.C., Parthia and nearby kingdoms were themselves subject to diverse military pressures: -

The three mighty kingdoms of Parthia, Armenia, and Pontus were at this time strategic buffer states between the Western World and the Far East. They were under pressure simultaneously from the Romans of the West and from the Sakas, the Sacrucae, and the Tocharians of the northeast, who were being pushed westwards by the relentless and inexorable pressure of the Huns, who were pressed in turn by the Chinese.(80)

For Rome, these partly Hellenised kingdoms became a foci of foreign policy and military entanglement, especially the kingdom of Pontus in northern Asia Minor. The fates of these three countries were soon entangled with each other and Rome: -

. . . Mithridates [II] intervened in the affairs of Armenia and placed his protégé, Tigranes, on the throne. By so doing he inaugurated a new era in the history of that country, whose future fortunes were to remain closely linked to those of Iran. Shortly afterwards Tigranes allied himself with Mithridates Eupator of Pontus who, between 112 and 93 B.C., created a powerful kingdom that included all Asia Minor and bordered on continental Greece and for many years resisted the Roman advance. Faced with this alliance which strengthened the position of Armenia, Mithridates II adopted a waiting policy. When in 92 B.C. the Romans reached the Euphrates, he sent them an embassy with a proposal of alliance. Sulla, knowing nothing of Parthian importance and power, treated the envoy in so cavalier a manner that the Great King took offence and came to terms with the two other oriental princes. Rome was to pay dearly for its contemptuous attitude on the occasion of this first contact with the Parthians.(81)

It is in fact more likely that Sulla understood the implications of the diplomacy involved, and set up the meeting and its seating arrangements in a way to ensure that he was viewed as the arbiter of arrangements with Armenia, and sought to establish a psychological, if short-term, advantage over Parthia in order to 'extract concessions'.(82)

Roman leaders including Sulla, Lucullus, and Pompey had to be sent out at different times to deal with one of the dreaded 'eastern' enemies of Rome, Mithridates VI Eupator of Pontus. Sulla's sustained efforts did manage to push Mithridates VI out of conquered territories, but after 85 B.C. Pontus was able to rebuild its power base. For ambitious Roman leaders, however, military commands were a way of extending their power, wealth and influence, especially if they achieved victories over powerful enemies or made beneficial settlements.(83) On the other hand, the internal politics of the late Roman Republic might also curtail wars and imperial expansion: -

Sulla wanted peace so as to be free to get back to Italy and take revenge on the followers of Marius and Cinna. The peace he made in 85 B.C. at Dardanus in the Troad was the softest a Roman was ever known to make, especially with an enemy like Mithridates, who had robbed and murdered at least 100,000 Roman and Italian citizens. All Mithridates was required to do was abandon all his conquests in Asia Minor, surrender eighty of his warships, and pay the trifling indemnity of 2,000 talents (two and a half million dollars).(84)

However, political and military victories could not always be guaranteed, nor create a stable state system along the eastern frontier. Although Lucullus made a successful invasion of Armenia in 69-8 B.C. and managed to maintain the de facto neutrality of Parthia,(85) he found himself accused of unnecessarily prolonging the war and was deprived of command by 67 B.C.(86) Mithridates was able

to return to Pontus, pushing Roman forces out at the Battle of Zela (spring 67 B.C.). Pompey the Great would thereafter attempt a much broader 'settlement' of the East, with one major agenda being the ability to establish a strong ring of states to exclude Parthian influence. Pompey invaded Pontus and defeated Mithridates' forces near Dasteira(87) [Mithridates of Pontus went on fighting and scheming until 63 B.C., and at the weary age of 68 had one of his Celtic bodyguards help him commit suicide, a story retold in Racine's *Mithridate* (88)]. Pompey pushed into Armenia, allowing Tigranes to keep his kingdom, but cutting down his territory. Though Parthian forces for a time occupied the region of Gordyene (on the Tigris), Pompey thereafter took a tough line with the Parthians, refusing to allow them to occupy territories he had promised them.(89)

To support this, however, Pompey needed to ensure a ring of provinces and client states along the frontier, forming a diplomatic and military settlement that would not readily be undermined by affairs occurring further to the east. Pompey then turned south and moved forces into Syria, annexing it as a new province. He then went on to 'help' settle a dispute in Judea between the 'princes' Hyrcanus and Aristobulus. He settled against Aristobulus,(90) and besieged his followers in the great Temple at Jerusalem, only breaking in after a difficult three month siege. The Jewish historian Josephus records that Pompey walked into the forbidden and sacred sanctuary of the Jews, noting there the sacred objects associated with the cult.(91) Pompey recognised Hyracnus as High Priest, but not as the king of Judea, thereby paving the way for the establishment of a later client kingdom in Judea.(92) From this time on Parthia would always have to keep an eye on the Roman legions strategically stationed in Syria, just to the north.

Pompey's settlement in the east was quite masterly. It established a ring of wealthy provinces on the Mediterranean, and then put in place a range of client kingdoms as buffer states to the east and south against the growing power of the Parthians. Provinces included Bithynia et Pontus, Asia, Cilicia, and Syria, with client-kingdoms in Galatia, Paphlagonia, Cappadocia, Armenior Minor, Commagene, Bosphorusm Oshoene east of the Euphrates, and Damascus, controlled by the Nabataean Arabs.(93) To the south there was the controlled kingdom of Judea, and for a time, the friendly kingdom of Egypt. This system was effective, but still needed pliant kings controlling Armenia, which could be reached equally by the Parthians marching up the Euphrates as by Roman forces moving from Asia Minor and Syria. A major conflict with Parthia over Armenia, however, was avoided at that time, circa 64 B.C..(94)

We can see the mixed attitudes to the Parthians in the subsequent actions of a Roman leader such as Crassus. A millionaire politician, he also wished to establish himself as a general of the stature of his triumviral colleagues, Pompey and Caesar.(95) His target for this political ambition, possibly combined with expectations of rich booty,(96) was Parthia, unfortunately for him and his followers. It is possible that Crassus hoped to make use of his incursion to support a claimant of the Parthian throne who was 'a Roman sympathiser'.(97) However, Crassus' advance was too slow to achieve this, and he, his son and seven legions were wiped out by the Parthian cavalry at the battle of Carrhae. Crassus had unwisely let his legions be lured away from the Euphrates river onto the open plain where the enemy's superior cavalry could operate. After the destruction of the Roman cavalry units, the defensive formations of the Roman legions were gradually worn down by the attacks of mounted archers and forced to retreat to whatever defensive terrain was available. Crassus proved himself an ineffective commander when faced with an enemy using unfamiliar tactics and strategies of misdirection. On the plain the legionaries could neither close with their enemy, nor escape encirclement.(98) The Parthians apparently deployed a thousand heavily armoured lancers, nine thousand horse archers, and a baggage train of a thousand camels supplying extra arrows, arrows which when projected by the Parthian compound bow could penetrate Roman armour.(99)

As 'grand strategy' this was a classic example of over-reach, and its dangers may have been well recognised in Rome where it was opposed by elements in the Senate and most vigorously by a tribune.(100) Crassus had marched down the Euphrates, after having ignored the advice of the Armenian king to move into Mesopotamia through the mountainous terrain of Armenia, where he could muster a larger force of local cavalry. Crassus had taken the precaution of providing himself

with auxiliary units of 4,000 cavalry and 4,000 light troops,(101) but these would prove insufficient once he allowed himself to be lured away from the river onto the open plain and cut off by enemy cavalry. The Parthian units consisted of two main types: the mounted archer, who used a powerful double convex bow, and secondly, brigades of heavy cavalry,(102) who to some degree are the ancestors of the European knights, though they lacked stirrups and therefore did not have couched lances. By the fourth century A.D. we also hear of the Persians using close fitting coats of flexible mail that deflect Roman missiles.(103) The tactics of these combined cavalry forces are described by Plutarch: -

Now they could be seen clearly, their helmets and breastplates blazing like fire, their Margianian steel glittering keen and bright, their horses armoured with plates of bronze and steel. . . . Their original plan was to charge the Romans with their lances and force their way through their front ranks. But when they saw the depth of the wall of shields with which they were confronted and how steadfastly and firmly the men were standing, they drew back again, while giving the impression that they were breaking their ranks and losing all cohesion, actually succeeded in surrounding the hollow square before the Romans realized what was happening. . . . The Parthians now spread out and began to shoot their arrows from all sides. There was no attempt at accurate marksmanship, since the Romans were so densely crowded together that it was impossible to miss the target even if one wished to do so. They merely kept on shooting with their great strong bows, curved so as to give the maximum impetus to the arrows, and the blows fell powerfully and heavily upon the Romans. Thus the positions of the Romans was, from the first, a very awkward one. If they stayed in their ranks they were wounded one after the other; if they attempted to come to close quarters with the enemy, they were still unable to do the enemy any harm and suffered just as much themselves. For the Parthians shot as they fled, being, indeed, more adept at this than anyone else except the Scythians . . . (104)

The result of this attempt to establish Crassus' military prestige led to some 20,000 Roman deaths, with another 10,000 captured.(105) He also lost the standards of these legions, a dishonour that would not be forgotten in later relations between the two empires, and whose return would be a later diplomatic triumph. This campaign was blighted by poor generalship and poor intelligence: on several occasions Crassus was expertly misled by his enemies. By this stage Parthia had emerged as a great power able to crush Roman legions at will, a shadow threatening Roman dominion of the east and controlling for a short time Syria and Judaea in a later offensive of circa 40-38 B.C. (106). Following the defeat of Crassus Parthian forces penetrated across the Euphrates into Syria but were at that time turned back by Cassius.(107) In turn, Parthia remained a target for the military ambition of later Roman leaders. If Parthia was the great enemy in the east, its defeat would also carry a unique prestige to a conquering general. In this context, Julius Caesar had apparently planned an ambitious Parthian campaign and had begun drafting troops, but did not live to conduct it.(108)

Mark Antony, too, launched a major campaign against the Parthians, who had used the opportunity of civil conflict to overrun parts of the Roman East, including Asia Minor, Syria and Judaea. Antony first sent his general Ventidius against them, who defeated Parthian incursive forces in major battles between 39 and 38 B.C. Antony then used the north-eastern route through Armenia into Media, whose king Artavasdes 'capitulated' and provided Antony with support cavalry forces.(109) Antony was successful until his supply routes through Armenia were threatened by a revolt and his baggage train attacked. He was forced to withdraw with the loss of some two legions plus several thousand other men.(110) He had defeated the Parthians in numerous battles, but was unable to force a decisive encounter, and could neither hold territory nor destroy the main enemy forces.(111) Nonetheless, images of eastern conquests may have formed part of some long term notion of his sovereignty of the east: Antony himself held a kind of triumph for his victories in Armenia, and then made a public 'donation' of parts of the east to Queen Cleopatra, including Cyprus, Libya and part of Syria. He went on to nominate his son (by Cleopatra), called Alexander, the king of Armenia, Media and Parthia (though none of these were fully conquered). His other son was to receive Phoenicia, Syria and Cilicia.(112) This went well beyond the kind of client relations Pompey had established in the region, though it may have been a display set up mainly for propaganda purposes.

After the victory of Octavian over Antony at Actium and then in Egypt, we find a modified policy emerging towards the east and Parthia. Egypt from this time was ruled by an *eques* under direct

control of Octavian, and no members of the Senatorial class were allowed to visit without his express permission.(113) Likewise, Syria as a strategic region would come under the control of high ranking commanders, and later on imperial appointees or *legatus* rather than those under nominal senatorial control.(114) Antony's actual arrangements for the east were only changed in minor details,(115) with some enhancement of Herod the Great's position, but with the use of diplomacy to bring about an accommodation with Parthia.(116) The 'great conquest' of Parthia, yearned for in the literature of the period, and recorded on coins and in the *Res Gestae* of Augustus, was little more than the skilful management of eastern diplomacy.(117) The Romans soon decided on a politic approach to the frontier: -

Under Octavian, who soon had himself transformed into Emperor Augustus ( 27 B.C.E.-14 C.E.), Rome adopted a very different attitude toward Parthia from that which had shaped its policy since the time of Sulla. He concluded, as a practical matter, that Parthia simply did not pose a serious threat to Rome or Roman interests anywhere west of the Euphrates for the foreseeable future. Parthia itself was plagued with far too much internal dissension, palace intrigues, rebellions, and succession crises to be an effective aggressor beyond its existing territorial bounds. A dynastic feud had broken out between the king Phraates IV and the pretender Tiridates that had kept the Parthians preoccupied, effectively preventing them from taking advantage of the turmoil in the Roman ranks preceding the battle of Actium. Tiridates was ultimately defeated but managed to escape across the Euphrates to Roman-held territory in Syria. This gave Augustus an important bargaining chip that he exploited with skill, reaching an agreement with Phraates in 23 that delineated their common frontiers.

Notwithstanding the expansionist ambitions of some of his advisers, Augustus had decided to pursue a more conservative policy with regard to Parthia. He was mindful of the fact that the Parthians had demonstrated repeatedly that they could be especially formidable when it came to mobilizing their resources for defense. In other words, Augustus recognized the practical utility of drawing a mutually acceptable frontier between Rome and Parthia at the Euphrates, something that Pompeius had refused to do.(118)

Augustus conducted a major tour of the eastern provinces between 22 and 19 B.C., ensuring meanwhile that one of the two consuls was a supporter and a military man being ennobled by that office for the first time, e.g. L. Arruntius, M. Lollius and C. Sentius Saturninus.(119) Diplomacy and careful pressure were used to secure the return of the standards lost by Crassus to the Parthians (hence Roman coins were issued with the legend *Signis Receptis*, 'Standards Recovered'), while a Roman choice was made for the ruler of Armenia, indicating a pro-Roman settlement through 20 B.C. that helped regional trade flows.(120) Moreover, the diplomatic relations through 20-10 B.C. 'was in fact a Roman recognition of Parthia's power', with Augustus willing to let Armenia remain within the orbit of Parthian hegemony so long as Rome approved the Armenian king.(121) Phraates IV gave over four of his sons as hostages to M. Titius, governor of Syria, but this may have been to control internal seditions and plots as much as to secure Roman 'friendship'.(122)

By AD 1 new tensions had emerged, as had a stronger grasp of diplomatic means to deal with them: -

The Parthian had written to explain his activity in Armenia and to demand back his brothers who were in Rome. Augustus' reply omitted to call Phraataces 'king' and demanded that he lay aside the royal name and withdraw from Armenia. This was a tough public stance to support the personal mission to the East on which his adopted son Gaius had embarked. In a further letter, Phraataces styled himself 'king of kings' and referred to Augustus merely as Caesar. These well-modulated insults reveal a remarkable knowledge of the political set-up in the other country. But it is clear that both sides knew how to keep the insults within reasonable limits, as part of the diplomatic manoeuvring, and they did not undermine the attempt to find a negotiated settlement. (123)

This diplomacy culminated in a high level meeting between Gaius and Phraataces, leading to an 'equal' treaty that formed a major precedent for events over the next six decades.(124) It led to the Euphrates being recognised as the demarcated and symbolic border between the two empires.(125)

These trends accord with the proposals for the natural 'limits to empire' that Augustus seems to have

passed on in his 'last testament' to Tiberius.(126) From now on, Syria would be a crucial military province viewed as a base for both defence of the empire,(127) and a salient for power projection against Armenia and Parthia as required. In turn the Romans feared that the Parthians would come to have the long-term goal of conquering Syria permanently, though this proved untenable.(128) It was also not far from troublesome regions such Judaea and Palestine. Likewise, for the following decades Rome would be deeply interested in establishing greater Roman influence on Armenia, and in securing a friendly prince on the throne of that kingdom, such as Tigranes II.(128) This led to continued tensions through the reigns of the emperors Tiberius and Nero, with limited clashes continuing in AD 37, through 51-57 A.D. and again in 62 A.D.(130) It is possible that these policies were also stimulated by calls for revenge against the Parthians on the part of Roman authors and the public, even if the Parthians themselves remained 'shadowy figures' to most citizens.(131) In the long run, however, Rome would find Armenia most useful as a balancing state, hinged across both Roman and Parthian spheres of interest.(132)

Through the second half of the first century, Rome and Parthia achieved a rough balance of power in the east, hinged on control of Armenia, and with a de facto border along the Euphrates River, though this was always more a psychological and political frontier than a real physical barrier.(133) Even though Rome probably had more wealth and power, it was also unable to secure permanent victories against Parthia. Parthia, in turn, had to face major territorial challenges in the east and north, and found its security readily undermined by Armenian plots, Roman incursions from Syria, or by internal dissent. These trends can be summarised: -

Vologases now placed Tiridates (63-100) back on the throne of Armenia, but also suggested a political compromise to resolve the seemingly endless conflict with Rome over the country. He proposed that both Rome and Parthia agree to reestablish the Euphrates as the frontier between them. While he continued to insist that Tiridates be acknowledged as king of Armenia, he proposed, as a means of satisfying the public requirements of Roman honor, that Tiridates should receive his crown from the hands of Nero in Rome. This suggestion was acceptable to Nero, who had little interest in attempting to extend Roman control any farther eastward. Nero subsequently formally invested Tiridates, with great pomp, as king of Armenia in Rome in 66. Following this, the relations between Rome and Parthia remained relatively stable and peaceful for another fifty years.(134)

This was followed by a period of 'rapprochement' under the reign of Vespasian, with the Parthians even willing to offer support to the Romans in the Jewish War, and asking for Roman help against an Alan incursion, a request at this stage refused.(135) Vespasian, however, did move to rationalise the eastern frontier, annexing the kingdom of Commagene, gaining control of Palmyra, improved supply routes from the Black Sea and across Anatolia, and fortified Marmozica (in modern Georgia) in A.D. 75, though this did not lead to a major breach with the Parthians.(136)

However, such relative concord could not be sustained indefinitely. The attraction of expanding the eastern frontier was to be a recurring feature of Roman imperial policy in the second century. Between A.D. 111 and 117 the Roman emperor Trajan would prepare the ground for strengthening the eastern defences and then engage in major campaigns against Parthia, mobilising at least eleven legions plus their auxiliaries.(137) One of Trajan's first tasks was to stabilise the Roman Empire's northern frontiers, after which he sought a more conclusive solution to the 'Parthian' problem, by now viewed as Rome's traditional enemy in the east.(138) Trajan sought fame through military glory, and he may even have hoped to emulate the successes of Alexander the Great, a factor that also influenced Pompey, Crassus and the emperor Julian.(139) Moreover, these frontiers were real sources of insecurity to the Romans, and by 'securing' them Trajan also sought to ensure the prestige and stability of his own reign.(140) It is also possible that, as a secondary goal, Rome sought greater control over trade routes, thereby cutting out the Parthian 'middleman', whose communities had benefited from the Silk Road transit trade.(141)

It was perhaps for these reasons that Trajan rejected peace offers from King Osroes in A.D. 113.(142) He used the pretext that the Parthians had recognised a new king of Armenia without Roman

approval, and firmly rejected an embassy that sought recognition of Parthamasiris, thereby ensuring that military conflict would continue.(143) Trajan first annexed the region of Jordan, known as the province of 'Arabia', with its capital at the ancient trading city of Petra, thus reinforcing the frontier by establishing a network of roads, towers and camps on this southern border that would be extended into northern Mesopotamia.(144) In 114 A.D. he launched a full scale invasion of Armenia, Adiabene and then Parthia,(145) successfully pushing down the Euphrates to capture Ctesiphon and marching south to the Persian Gulf. On this basis, he earned the title of *Parthicus*, recorded on a milestone on the road between Nisibis and Singara.(146)

Though Trajan had the power to conquer, he lacked the ability to hold or consolidate these gains. Two major problems undermined his victories. Through A.D. 115-117 there was a major insurrection of Jews in the Levant, including rebellions in Egypt and Judaea, as well as riots by Jews within Mesopotamia itself. It is possible but not certain that this indicated 'concerted resistance' to Trajan's expedition against Parthia.(147) Although suppressed, these revolts threatened his lines of supply and sapped reserve military forces. General revolts in southern Mesopotamia, and attacks on his supply bases in northern Mesopotamia,(148) forced Trajan to march north, recognising that he had not the means to hold Parthia, and in this context he tried to set up, unsuccessfully, a Roman nominee (Parthaspates) as a client king of Parthia.(149) On his return, having reached Selinus in Sicilia on the coast of Asia Minor, Trajan died of dropsy probably combined with a stroke, though he suspected that he may have been poisoned.(150) Hence, 'Trajan's coins with the slogans "Parthia capta" and "Rex Parthis datus" seem in part propaganda', part aspiration, and part recognition of the real importance of the East.(151)

His successor would totally reverse this expansionist policy. Hadrian abandoned much of the territory east of the Euphrates, at the same time stabilising revolts in the east and establishing strong defensive lines in Syria. He withdrew Roman forces and garrisons from Armenia, Mesopotamia and Parthia, the last of which he now allowed to have its own king, rather than the Roman puppet Trajan had tried to establish in Ctesiphon, though Rome kept control of parts of Arabia.(152) The Roman empire was at its greatest extent under Trajan, but this was a case of imperial over-reach, since 'territorial acquisition' thereafter was rarely permanent and tended to form part of 'unrealised projects'.(153) In part this was a return the idea of the pragmatic limits for the empire in the east, as suggested late in the reign of Augustus, especially after setbacks on the German frontier.(154)

A tactical change in military organisation allowed the Romans to reconsider conflict with the Parthians. When the Romans developed their own contingents of heavily armed cavalry, they could more easily go on to challenge Parthia again in A.D. 162-3, though it is not certain that they had mastered the wider strategic needs of 'desert warfare' as mobility on a grand scale.(155) Once again Roman forces were unable to hold what they conquered due to manpower shortages, exacerbated by renewed pressure on the Danube frontier.(156) Hence the campaigns of the emperor Lucius Verus made initial advances between A.D. 163 and 165, with Ctesiphon (and the royal palace) being captured, but in the end the Romans had to turn back, partly because of an epidemic which crippled their forces.(157) These campaigns did not immediately change the strategic balance among the two empires, though there may have been some disruption to the Parthian economy through A.D. 165-200.(158) Septimius Severus, too, undertook major wars against rival military leaders, as well as continuing wars against the Parthians, e.g. campaigns in A.D. 196 which led to the fall of Ctesiphon in the next year, thereby taking the title of Parthicus Maximus in 198, just as Trajan had before him. (159) However, Severus could not hold the Parthian capital, nor capture Hatra,(160) and had to return to Syria. Circa 198-199 Septimius proceeded to reorganise the eastern frontiers, and engaged in a phase of military construction, especially via a chain of forts controlling Wadi Sirhan, running from Jordan into Arabia.(161) His control of northern Mesopotamia would for a time limit Parthian regional influence, but "the legacy of Severus' annexation of Mesopotamia was constant and costly war."(162)

In later years, the succeeding Sasanian dynasty from 230 A.D. onwards managed to emerge as an even stronger threat,(163) drawing on the Parthian geo-strategic legacy: -

Artabanus V was twice victorious over the Emperor Macrinus and imposed a heavy tribute on Rome. Iran re-established its frontiers on the Euphrates and a Parthian invasion seemed only a matter of time. Thus after two and a half centuries, Roman attempts to reduce Iran to vassalage had ended in failure. The victories of Artabanus V seemed to herald a new era of Iranian expansion towards the West. But this was not to be achieved by the Arsacid dynasty, which proved incapable of expanding their power beyond that of the national framework. It was the Sassanians who, profiting from the favourable circumstances created by the Parthians, had their revenge on Rome and carried the arms of Iran to the shores of the Mediterranean.(164)

### **The Calibration of Roman Politics in the Light of the Eastern Frontier**

We can see the political effects in Rome of viewing Parthia as a great opposing power, an image which could influence politics within Rome from the late Republic onwards. Earlier Roman thought was negatively shaped by their own earlier negative experience of kingship and the image of despotic 'eastern' kings: thus Julius Caesar tried to avoid being called a king, that is, *rex*, unlike powerful titles with a republican precedent such as dictator. Did Julius Caesar really desire the crown, perhaps following the type of one of his heroes, Alexander the Great, and therefore using the offer of the crown as a way to test the mood of the People of Rome?(165) Or, was Mark Antony's offer merely a charade designed to allow Caesar to refuse it again, thereby undermining the propaganda of his enemies? To have refused a crown offered by a fellow consul could only have added to his prestige, and undercut the meanness of the attacks made by his opponents. This last explanation seems likely: to declare himself king would have been to fly in the face of centuries of tradition, and hardened resistance to him by many elements in the state and by elite competitors utilising the plea of *libertas*, a term indicating not freedom for all but the freedom for elite groups to compete and hold high office. (166) Furthermore, Caesar had his refusal recorded in the *Fasti*, the official records of magistrates, (167) once again a clever move in the war of words over his unusual pre-eminence. At the time a rumour had been circulated, derived supposedly from a Sibylline oracle, that the Parthians could only be defeated by a king - it was in this period that Caesar was contemplating a major eastern campaign. (168) Caesar may have wished to diffuse such rumours.(168)

The main difference between a king and a *dictator* or *princeps* was that a king would usually seek to found a dynasty, directly handing on power to a son or nearest relative. There is no evidence in Caesar's will, or the political arrangements he made for his adopted nephew, Octavian, that he intended to hand such power directly over to his descendant,(170) though no doubt he hoped for the continued high prestige of his family and those associated with him. That Octavian would be able to transform himself into a first among peers and be able to found an imperial line (as Augustus) was due to a complex erosion of public life through the late republic, and the intense public weariness with unending civil wars. Even his successor, Tiberius, would have to pretend to have leadership thrust upon him: he was technically offered enduring 'republican' powers by the Senate, *imperium* as extended political power but not kingship. Roman rulers for generations to come could not afford to appear as Persian or Parthian despots, though their domination of political life was almost as great.

Furthermore, the ritual of the Roman empire would come to parallel much of the bureaucratic and ceremonial procedure associated with eastern courts, adding a sense of distance between the emperor and what were becoming his subjects, as distinct from co-citizens.(171) One of the clearest early examples of this was the 'orientalized ceremony' in which the emperor Nero crowned the Parthian 'nominee' to the Armenian crown, though this was followed by Roman ritual 'of the closing of the temple of Janus as a sign of the establishment of peace.'(172) Likewise, luxurious and lavish imperial courts, e.g. under Constantine I and Constantius might come under criticism as 'orientalizing' and corrupt.(173) In later centuries both the Roman and Sasanian governments sought to move towards more centralised and autocratic government, with the Sasanids having tighter control of their vassal states and sub-regions.(174) The Sasanid court, in particular, seems to have over time developed an extended protocol and 'social stratification', though at first, in theory at least, even the poorest subjects could seek justice from the king, and it would only develop a complete bureaucracy in later times. (175) By the fifth century the Sasanian empire had developed important official posts the divided administrative workloads, with a proliferation of posts and honours.(176) On this basis, from Sasanid

times, books of rules or propriety (*A'in-namag*), dealing with protocol and conduct, were an aspect of Persian ruling culture, leading onto the later 'mirrors for princes' by 11<sup>th</sup> century writers.(177)

Were these accommodations between the two powers driven in part by systemic or geo-political limits to the expansion of the Roman empire? Partial barriers such as the Elbe, Danube and Euphrates Rivers had a real but only temporary impact on this issue. The attempt to expand northwards into Europe, and eastwards against Parthia, suffered from excessive resource loads, in part met by frontier provinces, and dangerously extended lines of supply. The Romans were able to build roads and forts, and logistically to support attacks deep into enemy territory, as is shown by the ability of the emperor Trajan to sack Ctesiphon, the capital of the Parthians, in the early second century A.D. Likewise, the emperors Marcus Aurelius and Septimius Severus would show that during the second century A.D. Roman forces would be able to defeat the Parthians in set battles.(178) But such expeditions required the mustering of huge forces, thereby weakening other major fronts. Likewise, such expeditions took time: a commander or emperor might expect to spend a minimum of two years to effectively campaign against Parthia. The issue here is not the 'dispersed' nature of Parthian patterns of habitation, with few major cities,(179) nor their indeed decentralised political structure,(180) but rather the political risk of such campaigns. Being out of touch with Rome and its politics for even a year was a dangerous exercise in trust or remote control. Logistically, too, Rome remained an empire centred on the Mediterranean with limited continental expansion through Gaul, southern Germany, the Balkans and Anatolia.(181) This problem would be moderated but not solved by the setting up of the second imperial capital of Constantinople in the early fourth century.

Why, then, were these major eastern campaigns still conducted in the imperial period? A man like Crassus might need to build his image, using glory to enhance his authority (*auctoritas*) with major military triumphs,(182) but once the empire came under the control of *Princeps* and Emperors, the need for such boosts to prestige was somewhat reduced. Even the emperor Julian (the Apostate) hoped to add the title of Parthicus to his name,(183) thereby indicating his conquest of that uniquely powerful foe (see further below). Limited wars against the Germans and Parthians were often viewed as pre-emptive or re-active, e.g. to ensure that Roman frontiers or security. Indeed, Roman perceptions were conditioned by the kinds of threats that the Republic had suffered from or neutralised, e.g. powerful tribal federations invading Gaul and Italy, or the threats posed by an overpowerful Carthage or Macedonia. Once Rome controlled an empire of provinces focused on the Mediterranean, its vision of defence could never be passive: -

Ever since the time of Augustus one of the cardinal principles of Roman frontier policy had been that any organized or hostile peoples just beyond the frontier line must either be laid low by force or disrupted by diplomacy at the first opportunity.(184)

As such, these campaigns were usually presented in Roman sources as defensive, and pretexted on 'just causes', therefore placing a moral and legal burden on the Parthians as the source of conflict and disorder.(185) In such a scheme of justification, the negative traits of the Parthians and their kings would have to be emphasised. Thus Julian in his satirical piece *The Caesars* would have the voice of Trajan justify expeditions of conquest thus: -

Against the Parthians I thought I ought not to employ force until they had put themselves in the wrong, but when they did so I marched against them, undeterred by my age, though the laws would have allowed me to quit the service.(186)

In these wars of regional control Rome was relatively effective, but wars of invasion or conquest leading deep into Mesopotamia were of a different order, representing the hope of a great triumph but entailing substantial risk. As such, Parthia and the following Sasanid house for over four centuries were the supreme balancers in the east, setting the horizon of Roman power and moderating her trade flows further east. It not surprising that Ammianus Marcellinus spoke of the Persians and their allies as 'countless peoples, who had gathered together over a long period to set the Roman world ablaze'. (187)



Rome could not commit the needed resources, financial and military, to directly occupy the Parthian and Persian heartlands for any length of time. Indeed, though Roman expansion did bring new allies and provinces under its control, it also brought about a paradox. We find that from the late Republic onwards Italian manpower soon became insufficient, and indeed unwilling, to shoulder the burden of such wars.(188) Rome became more dependant on Gallic sources of manpower, first extending citizenship to regions of southern Gaul in the late 1st century B.C., while by the time of the emperor Claudius we find Gauls attaining the rank of Equites (Knights), then selected men entering the Roman Senate and thereby creating a tier of Gallic senators. As its domain was extended, Rome's support base had to broaden and become more inclusive. This is the start of a centrifugal development which would result in later years with a Senate stocked by Africans, Greeks, Syrians and eventually even Egyptians (viewed by Romans as particularly unruly); all speaking Latin and Greek, but now with interests much wider than the confines of the *urbs Romana*, Italia or even the Mediterranean world. (189) At the same time, financial and social pressures made it difficult to support armies maintained for decades on major frontiers in an economic system that knew much about extracting resources through taxes, tribute and primary resources, but little about harnessing new forms of production or social capital.

This meant that shifts of power across the border could rapidly change the balance of forces between Rome her neighbours. A major renewal of the 'eastern' threat was thus driven by the replacement of the Arsacid dynasty of Parthia with the more aggressive Sasanid house of Iran taking leadership in the east when King Ardashir was crowned King of Kings in 226 A.D.(109) The early Sasanians aimed at seizing a vast empire, in part based on 'cultural as well as political aggrandizement in imitation of the past', as indicated by the rock reliefs and inscriptions at Naqsh-e Rostam.(191) Ardashir and then his son Shapur I managed to capture many pro-Roman towns, and for a time occupied Antioch: in general, the frontier between the two empires had now shifted some 500 miles westwards.(192) The Persians subjected the Romans to another major defeat, partly due to Roman imperial intrigues, in A.D. 244 when Gordian III died during 'an abortive invasion along the upper Euphrates'.(193)

The problem for Rome of a 'shallow' eastern frontier remained during the third century. As well as problems on the Persian frontier, a great plague also disturbed the Balkans and North Africa during the 250's. In 259 the emperor Valerian was able to relieve the Persian pressure on Antioch, but at Edessa his army was encircled, with one of the greatest military losses in Roman history, while Valerian himself was captured and tortured,(194) an unbelievable calamity for Roman prestige. It is in this context that Shapur I became viewed as an empire builder, and as a quintessential 'enemy of Rome', having defeated the emperors Gordian, Philip and Valerian.(195) Roman control of Mesopotamia was lost, only to be regained after the incursion of the Emperor Carus in 283 A.D., leading to new peace agreements.(196)

Military capabilities began to improve for the Roman Empire with Diocletian's economic and administrative reforms of the late third century.(197) Diocletian soon revealed himself as a competent and inventive ruler. His first step was to raise a military colleague, Maximian, to the status of Caesar, thereby broadening his own support base. Shortly after he elevated him to the equal rank of Augustus, creating a dual imperial system. But Diocletian went further than this in seeking stability for the empire. In 293 A.D. he and Maximian appointed two Caesars to help them in their rule, Constantius I and Galerius, who would assist their superior colleagues, and help rule the far reaches of empire.(198) Diocletian, for example, would use Nicomedia in Bithynia and, later on, Antioch in Syria as his regional capitals, thereby keeping an attentive eye on the Persian frontier.(199) He also sought to stabilise the eastern frontier through 'defences in depth', including a system of fortifications and fortresses such as Circusium on the Euphrates.(200) It would also allow coordinated activities by more than one supreme commander, e.g. the invasion of Narses was in part curtailed through the actions of Diocletian's defence of the frontier Syria and later on Galerius' aggressive northern march via Armenia.(201) For a time, Diocletian was able to stabilise the eastern frontier to Rome's advantage, establishing a peace that would last forty years,(202) but this would not continue through the next century. As part of this settlement trade between the Roman and Persian zones was to be routed through the city of Nisibis alone, indicating Roman desires to control the frontier and perhaps

to curb the infiltration of spies.(203)

During the early fourth century upper Mesopotamia had come again under Roman control, largely due to Galerius' military successes,(204) but this did not lead to a stable frontier: -

By that time the Parthian Empire which had confronted Rome across the Euphrates in the first two centuries had been replaced by a Persian Empire in the 220s, and northern Mesopotamia had become an endlessly contested battleground between the two powers. Roman direct rule had been substituted for a whole series of dependent kingdoms, among them Judaea, Commagene, Emesa, Nabataea and Osroene.(205)

The burden of military costs was high when combined with a system of elites that needed to extract wealth to maintain prestige, demonstrate symbolic power through maintaining clients and public duties, and build political careers. In total effect, the Roman economy had been heading for some time away from a relatively uncontrolled market towards a planned economy: Diocletian's reforms, and the need for the empire to support a huge military structure against growing external threats, moved it in the direction of a 'command economy', an effective but not permanent solution.(206) In doing so, it stifled much of the vigour of its great trading cities (especially in the east), which had become huge cosmopolitan centres during the Hellenistic Age and the early Roman period (330 B.C. - A.D. 100), thereby in part reducing the long-term social stability of the eastern parts of the empire in following centuries.

However, the Roman empire during the third and fourth centuries A.D. was still in superficial ways very strong. Thus, Rome managed once again to push its frontier zone east of the Euphrates: -

. . . Roman control had extended across the Euphrates, to cover the whole of the shelf which lies between the Taurus Mountains and the Mesopotamian plain proper, finally to reach the Tigris. South of the shelf, or of the Jebel Sinjar which marks its southern edge in the east, it was only for a brief period in the third century that Roman forces found themselves stationed at the city of Hatra, the capital of a small kingdom which had formed part of the Parthian Empire. So far as we know, Hatra was never to be Roman again after its capture by Shapur I in about 240. As regards the eastern part of the shelf, lying south of Mons Masius, an outlying spur of the Taurus (the Tur Abdin, later to be the heartland of Syriac monasticism), and including the city of Nisibis, Roman dominance was to be enshrined in the treaty with Persia in 298 or 299, only to be surrendered forever after the defeat and death of Julian in 363. Thereafter, the zone where Syriac Christianity flourished was to be divided, west of Nisibis, by the frontier between the two empires. Between the two treaties, of 298/299 and 363, however, the Roman military presence had also extended north of Mons Masius to take in an even less known area: the plain between the mountain and the Tigris, along the stretch where the river, on leaving the main Taurus range, turns almost due east, before swinging south round the end of Mons Masius past the eventual Roman fort of Bezabde to enter the north-east corner of the Mesopotamian plain. It was on this stretch of the Tigris, just before it turns east, that in the 330s Constantius, as 'Caesar' under his father Constantine, was to fortify the city of Amida (Diyarbakir).(207)

Control of Armenia and Mesopotamia had for a time been achieved, in large measure through the treaty of 299, with the extended eastern frontier being strengthened under Diocletian but remained a tempting target for Persian counter-claims.(208)

Imperial ambition could still upset the architecture of Roman dominance in the Near East. In 356 A.D. the young Julian won a strong victory over the Germans in a battle near Strasbourg, strengthening his credentials as a military commander, and winning eventual proclamation by the army as Augustus.(209) Reacting in part to Persian hostilities along the eastern frontier, to the sieges of Nisibis, Amida and Singara, but also driven by personal ambition, Julian invaded Persian territories.(210) Pragmatically, it is also possible that Julian needed such victories to detract from strong Christian opposition to his hellenizing ('pagan') religious policies, and his growing unpopularity in Antioch, based in part on his inability to reform or revitalise municipal senates in order to deal with famine and inflation that continued in spite of his intervention.(211)

These military operations are hard to view as purely defensive in nature, though they are cast in part as punitive and pre-emptive operations against an aggressive Persian king. Julian may have made comparisons between the Persians and the historical threats posed by early enemies such as Carthage and Veii.(212) However, Julian's own letters seem to confirm both an intent to settle the eastern frontier as well as the desire to return as a conquering hero avenging past aggression by the Persians (perhaps influenced by models as diverse as Alexander, Marcus Aurelius and Trajan), and we should not dismiss the idea that he thought a long term victory was possible.(213) That he may have entertained such ambitions is hinted at in one of his rhetoric works where he has Alexander the Great criticise Roman claims to glory: -

And if you think the conquest of Persia such a trifle and disparage an achievement so glorious, tell me why, after a war of more than three hundred years, you Romans have never conquered a small province beyond the Tigris which is still governed by the Parthians? Shall I tell you why? It was the arrows of the Persians that check you.(214)

Once again, however, victories on the battlefield did not equate with the ability to hold territory, and it seems that Julian underestimated the scale and resources of the Persian Empire, which had a deeper field of operation than his opponents on the Rhine frontier.(215) The Roman forces were forced to evacuate, with Julian losing his life in one of these battles, perhaps due to treachery among his own followers, though this view is not directly credited by Ammianus Marcellinus.(216) High hopes had been dashed, as indicated by Libanius: -

The Persian empire should now lie in ruins, and Roman governors instead of satraps now be administering their territory under our laws: our temples should here be adorned with booty got from them, while the victor in his contest should be seated on his imperial throne, receiving the orations composed in honour of his exploits. Such, I am sure, would be right and proper. . . . We expected the whole empire of Persia to form part of that of Rome.(217)

Once again a Roman emperor had lost his life in a fateful clash with the Persians. His successor, Jovian, would have to give up five 'frontier provinces' that had been held along the Tigris River, surrender the strong points of Nisibis and Singara, and cede dynastic influence on Armenia, pragmatic but unpopular policies.(218)

At this stage the Persians were a permanent thorn in the Roman side, a reminder of the real risks to eastward expansion. At the same time, it was an empire with which the Romans developed a diplomatic protocol, an ability to forge temporary or decades-long treaties,(219) and a recognised power in the east, as implied by a story in Herodian whose fictive account suggests Roman recognition of the two empires as controlling the barbarians around them.(220) These protocols included the sending of envoys, the provision of protective escorts, the use of (at least) bilingual translators, the adoption of written Greek as the language of regional communication, the use, or intentional misuse, of titles in correspondence, as well as formal meetings on bridges or boats that spanned the Euphrates (symbolising an equality of meeting at the frontier), as well as shared feasts.(221) Thus, when such a protocol was breached, it was well understood as an aggressive move and not just a breakdown of diplomacy.(222)

These traditions continued through the Byzantine period. On this basis the borders between the empires were at times regulated by mutual recognition of the real power of both.(223) By the late 6<sup>th</sup> century, it emerged that both Byzantium and Persia 'suffered from constant warfare with no decisive advantage to either'.(224) This could even lead to some areas of mutual cooperation, e.g. under Shapur III the defence of the northern passes over the Caucasus became crucial due to 'nomad' invaders threatening both Persian and Byzantine interests. On this basis Byzantium at times shared the expenses of protecting this region and maintaining the Darband defences, though the withholding of these funds would cause renewed tensions in the early 6<sup>th</sup> century.(225) Indeed, by A.D. 540 Khusrau I again invaded the Roman Empire, claiming that the emperor Justinian had provoked the Huns into attacking Parthia.(226) However, in the long run the halting of the Huns in the Caucasus 'merely deflected them around the Black Sea to the Roman West'.(227)

Likewise, both sides could engage in mutually understood diplomacy and treaty processes, e.g. the detailed treaties of 298/299 and 561 A.D. in particular.(228) By this stage elaborate diplomatic protocols and bilingual interpreters had been developed between these two powers.(229) The borders between the two empires would tend to become more rigid between 387 and 536, with most autonomous buffer or median states being absorbed or directly controlled.(230) Underneath these courtesies and *de facto* recognition of a regional balance of power, there probably remained 'a deep vein of enmity' and perhaps even 'mutual contempt' (231) based on religious and cultural differences. However, in the long run the contest for power ultimately weakened both, and helped provide the regional conditions for sweeping Arab victories from A.D. 636 down till 651, when the Sasanian empire fell.(232)

### **Frontier Trading Cities and Transnational Religious Flows**

The Parthian and subsequent Persian dynasties were more than just 'strategic competitors' on the frontier for Rome expansion. They also resurrected the problem of religious tolerance and minorities across both empires, whereby Jews, Manichees and Christians were part of the equation of relations between these empires. Intolerance became even more the norm in Roman governance once it became a Christian empire. In turn, within the Persian zone Christians, with their allegiances turned towards Rome, Byzantium or a wavering Armenia, might be viewed with suspicion.(233) In general terms it is true to say the Parthians were more tolerant than the Sasanians in religious affairs, in part because Adashir in setting up the Sasanids dynasty as 'King of kings' may have used religious claims to bolster his 'right by conquest',(234) though individual rulers would vary greatly in these policies. However, the dynamism and wealth of the East had continued appeal: 'Western influence . . . trickled in - forerunners of the flood of Christian artisans, builders, silk weavers, and visiting philosophers, who would be drawn to Mesopotamia as the shadow of the Sasanian kings lengthened across the Near East.'(235) These problems would thus today be called transnational problems,(236) with cultural, religious and migration flowing across military borders in a way that would be viewed as a definite security threat for imperial systems jealous of alternative sources of authority.

We can thus note that in Ammianus Marcellinus' account, concerned with Julian's campaigns against Persia, we do hear of defectors, deserters, spies, false intelligence and ordinary people operating out of self-interest 'to cross the line' and help the opposing empire.(237) Likewise, in later centuries prisoner transportations, population exchanges, deportation of skilled workmen, and voluntary movements of artisans and mercenaries did occur across these border lands.(238) These transnational flows, combined with the role of border kingdoms and cities that formed the conduit for trade, generated not just real knowledge, but also images and fears of defection, deceit, and instability that would shape Roman images of a near east that was full of both opportunities and dangers (see further below).

In this setting, Jewish populations would come to find themselves squeezed between Roman and Persian spheres of interest, a factor of some concern with sizeable Jewish minorities located under Parthian control.(239) Thus, when populations in Palestine came to be disenchanted with Roman domination, they were viewed as a potential fifth column that might welcome a change of rule. During the third century A.D. a number of rabbis came to interpret Biblical prophecies as pointing to the immanent fall of the Roman empire, a messianic expectation that would draw official suspicion. (240) In turn, Jewish populations in Seleucia and Babylon were at times 'disenchanted with Parthian rule'.(241) In the first three centuries of the current era their fate was a complex mix of cooperation and suppression, while from the second century a Jewish exilarch had civil authority recognised by the Parthian government.(242) Speaking of events before 226 A.D., Neusner suggests: -

The evidence is . . . that the Jews in Babylonia lived in relatively close contact, both physical and cultural, with their neighbours. Their main center, Nehardea, was not far from the great Hellenistic city, Seleucia on the Tigris; and in any case, Greeks, Babylonians, Pagan Semites, Jews and Parthians inhabited the narrow strip of fertile land around the Royal Canal which later historians so generously assigned to the Jews alone. We know, for example, that in the first century, when the Jewish barony of Anileus and Asineus was established, the local Greeks and Babylonians

opposed it and eventually succeeded in gaining Parthian support to destroy it, but that, for a time, the two brothers ruled *both* Jewish *and* Hellenistic and Babylonian populations, all in a relatively small area around, but apparently not including Nehardea itself. . . . Furthermore, the Greek city of Seleucia contained a Hellenized Jewish population.(243)

It is in this context of the political affiliation of religious groups, particularly against sects regarded as intrusive and perhaps anti-Roman, that a general sacrifice was ordered within the Roman empire for 306 A.D.(244) Governors could order people to make sacrifice before an image of the emperor, thereby testing their loyalty. It was likely that the main targets were in the army and administration, as well as prominent leaders of city communities. This test of loyalty may not have been directed at Christianity alone, but at the Manichean sect, whose members were suspected of holding allegiance to the Persian empire. It is possible in the previous century that King Narses' support for Mani and his missionary activity contained a distinct 'anti-Roman' element, with the Manichean influence being blamed in fanning a major revolt in Egypt.(245) The then Emperor Diocletian had instructed that the Manichean creed 'of the Persians' be completely suppressed.(246) Here trans-regional religious cults were one focus of perceived threats in a deepened contest among sources of social and political authority.

Once the Roman empire had become Christianised, Christians and Manichees within the Persian zone of influence would come under alternating pressures from Zoroastrianism and then Islam.(247) The first Sasanid king, Ardashir I (also called Artaxerxes in some sources) came from a line of 'of high-priests who were hereditary guardians of the great temple at Istakhr in southern Iran', giving his line a religious foundation.(248) The first 'great persecution' of Christians occurred under the Sasanid king Shapur II, beginning in 339, and in part reacting to the progressive Christianisation of the Roman Empire after Constantine.(249) Churches affiliated with Rome, Constantinople and Antioch would come under suspicion, but once 'Nestorianism had been condemned and Nestorians were seeking refuge in Persia' this pattern would begin to change.(250) The 'Persian' Church firmly broke away from Antioch's affiliation sometime after 422-424 A.D., electing their own 'Catholicus' with his seat in Ctesiphon, where its synods were held, though Edessa had been a major training centre in its early phase, with this role declining between 457 and 489 A.D.(251) Thereafter the 'Nestorian' Church, as an independent group with different doctrines from the west emerged from 483-484 A.D. onwards, with Nestorian doctrines firmly entrenched by 497 A.D.(252) Sasanid tolerance was largely based on political realisations: -

The Sassanid dynasty continued in power, and was, on the whole, tolerant. This was because it was recognized that the Church in Persia was alienated from the Church of the Roman Empire, and it was considered more prudent to make Christians within the Persian Empire feel secure within their national boundaries, rather than to encourage them to look to their co-religionists across the border.(253)

The Nestorian Church would come under partial Sasanid protection, with a phase of persecution during Chosroe I's (also transliterated as Khosrow or Khusrau) conflict with the Roman Empire (540-545 A.D.) and again under Chosroes II from 608 down till 628 A.D. It thereafter extended its activities as far eastwards as Mongolia, India and China.(254)

Trade was the other major driver of transnational flows of goods, information, and people across the Near East. Roman and Hellenistic interests in the region were not entirely strategic and political. Trade routes across Arabia, Egypt, and onto the Indian Ocean were also of considerable importance. Parthia, in effect, became one of the links in east-west trade, for about 115 B.C. 'Mithridates [II of Parthia] received an embassy from the Emperor of China, and the two rulers concluded a treaty designed to facilitate the movement of international commerce in which Iran, as a transit state, formed a vitally important link.'(255) Parthian coins have been found in the Caucasus, the Volga region, and even in eastern Turkestan, indicating extensive trade networks reaching from Dura Europos (Syria) to Merv (Turkmenistan), while the Parthians also had a share in trade flows from India.(256) However, from the first century A.D. onwards, new enemies in the east helped open Roman trade routes that in part bypassed Parthia: -

Rome's interest in the region went beyond the matter of imperial glory for its own sake. At issue were significant economic interests as well. In the middle of the first century, the Kushans, a group belonging to the confederation of the Yueh-chi or Tokhari, under their king Kujula Kadphises, came south out of Central Asia and occupied Bactria, apparently seized Merv from the Parthians, and established the Kushan frontier at Hyrcania. Thus, when Hyrcania, with the Kushans on its northern and eastern flanks, attempted to break away from Parthia and assert its independence in 58 [A.D.], this provided Rome with the opportunity, by means of an alliance with Hyrcania, to establish an important trade route to China and India. Goods from the east were now able to pass down the Oxus, cross the Caspian Sea, and connect with the Black Sea through the Cyrus River, without the need to cross Parthian territory at any point.(257)

The later (Persian) Sasanian dynasty, too, was interested in controlling and benefiting from the trade that flowed from India and the eastern region to Byzantine markets, and seems to have raised the price of prestige items flowing westwards by adding high taxes, while its merchants came to largely dominate trade flows in the Persian Gulf and Red Sea, as well as buying up major cargoes in some Indian ports.(258)

Likewise, the desert regions of Mesopotamia, Syria and Arabia were not merely partial barriers, for like 'a sea, the desert nourished border towns, the meeting places of caravans and people.'(259) Thus we can speak of a shifting network of 'caravan cities' such as Dura Europos (a fort as much as a trade centre) and Palmyra that were also conduits of cultural and religious diversity amid the shifting frontiers of these great empires.(260) This cultural and religious diversity also would have long-term political implications in relation to the power of the centre. Religion and cult formed one of the major flows along routes of trade and conquest, with flow-on effects for cultural identity and political control, including official Roman adoption of Christianity: -

During the period of Roman hegemony such self-definition offered the scope for a culture within a culture, a space for initiates (in the context of religion), which need not resist the dominating power but which - if the circumstances arose - might do so. Moreover, within the broad grip of imperial control, the various local religions of the empire were tolerated and encouraged to compete. Such competition (which we will observe in the case of Dura Europos) was a very effective form of "segmentary opposition", which the Empire had every reason to encourage on the sound hegemonic principle of "divide and rule." But it engendered in the various competing religions an element of resistance to each other - of self-definition by polemic against other cults and by reversal of other cults' practices. The risk, from the dominating state's point of view, in such a system (as it had developed by the third century C.E.) was that it needed a very small step for a cult to move from resisting the others to resisting the center (in the form of the imperial cult, for instance). This was always something that was potentially possible. Nothing proves the power of the cults as a means of engendering a strong sense of cultural identity among their followers so much as the state's decision under Constantine to harness one of the most eccentric to its own bandwagon as the new state religion.(261)

In turn, the region of Mesopotamia was itself a zone of great cultural diversity and religious creativity in the third century: -

In the small region, a parallelogram of no more than 200 miles in length and 50 in breadth, we find the following: first, and most important, the resurgence of a conquering, proselytizing Mazdeism, propagated by the state under Ardashir, and established (if in a tolerant manner) as the state religion under Shahpuhr with its exponent Kartir; second, the development of an Iranian gnostic syncretism by the prophet Mani, who, at the time of the redecoration of the Dura synagogue, proclaimed a new religion and in the next decades attracted a wide following in Iran and in the Roman Empire as well; third, the advance of Christianity (Mani's father was probably a Christian, and Jesus played a part in his theology) into the Mesopotamian valley from Edessa, where, by 201, it had become well established; fourth the great expansion of cults within the Iranian idiom, in particular, Mithraism, in both Iran and the Roman Empire, to the point where Mithraism was perhaps the single most popular religion on the Roman side of the frontier; fifth, and by no means least, the beginnings of a revolution in Babylonian Judaism, which transformed the earlier indigenous religion into a fair representation of the ideas of the Palestinian Tannaim . . . and which must have created a tremendous upheaval in Babylonian Jewry. These events, each of them of lasting importance in the religious life of Mesopotamia, took place within a brief period; one may say that from *circa* 220 to *circa* 250 in Babylonia Manichaeism, Rabbinic Judaism and Mazdeism were all taking form.(262)

In part, such changes were diffused along existing trade and cultural networks. Dura Europos, initially a Hellenistic fortress established by Nicanor, a general of Seleucus I, was on the line of two caravan routes, one passing from Seleucia (later on Ctesiphon) up the Euphrates towards Antioch, and other westward route across the desert to Palmyra.(263) Dura was initially controlled by Macedonians, next by the Parthians from circa 113 B.C., and then captured by the Romans permanently in A.D. 164 (for whom it was a key frontier town), and thereafter for a shorter time it was seized by the Sasanian Persians.(264) If in general terms it was more influenced by Parthian than Roman culture, it was also a diverse meeting point for a wide range of regional influences, including Jewish, Mesopotamian, Greek, and Iranian.(265) It used Greek, Aramaic, Palmyrene (as a local dialect), Latin, Hebrew and the Pahlavi alphabet for different purposes, while within one family Greek, Roman, and Parthian names might be found.(266) As noted by Rostovtzeff: -

When Septimius Severus raised Dura to the rank of a colony many of them became Roman citizens (as did their Palmyrene companions) and assumed the name of Septimius. But they were neither true Romans nor true Greeks, although their ancestors had certainly been Graeco-Macedonian colonists. Their nationality is impossible to determine and, in one and the same family, the father will bear a Greek name, the wife a Semitic, and the children Greek, Iranian, or Semitic names.(267)

Dura had at least five major temples, a synagogue with fine wall paintings, a strong fort and citadel, and thick walls on the three sides not bounded by the river.(268) In part, it guarded the major caravan routes, and at other times was an important frontier fort basing Roman soldiers.(269) Even as its role as a caravan centre may have declined through the early third century A.D., it is likely that it continued to collect customs dues from those crossing into the Roman frontier region.(270) The city was finally captured by the Sasanians circa A.D. 253 and destroyed in 256, perhaps in response to a revolt against Persian control.(271)

Palmyra, initially probably known as Tadmor and part of early Syrian caravan routes from Assyrian times, became a partly Hellenised city which was much more important during Roman engagement of the Near East.(272) Palmyra flourished on the long-distance trade linking Rome with eastern luxuries:

Its sudden growth to the size of one of the largest towns in the East coincides with the moment in history when the demand for oriental luxuries began to grow in Rome and its dominions, and it was due to the clever policy of its merchants and camel-drivers who knew how to keep order in the desert between their town and the great factories and warehouses of Lower Mesopotamia. From that time caravans were able to cross the Syrian desert instead of skirting it, and the transit brought huge profits to the Palmyrenes.(273)

Palmyra would come to exhibit Semitic, Aramaic, Babylonian, Greek, Parthian (especially in artistic conventions), Iranian and Roman elements in its language, culture and administrative structures, clearly indicating its east-west linkages across key trade routes.(274) It had a large caravanserai, as well as temples of Bel, Arsu and Azizu.(275) The long periods of relative peace between Rome and Parthia allowed Palmyra to flourish as a caravan city that hosted a network of expatriate trading communities stretching from the Mediterranean deep into the Parthian empire and as far as India, with its merchants also owning ships in 'both Roman and Parthian ports'.(276) Palmyra would evolve from a prosperous caravan city to virtual autonomy, followed by a final effort to set itself up as a powerful and independent kingdom under Odenath and Zenobia, leading to its eventual crushing by Roman forces in A.D. 272, reducing it to 'little more than a cross-road oasis', with trade diverted in part to Aleppo and Chalcis.(277)

Other trade and 'border' cities, small states and fortified cities acted as conduits for trade and cultural contact. These included at various times: Edessa (used for a time by emperor Constantius as his 'forward headquarters, later on the centre of the independent kingdom of Osrhoene), nearby Commagene, Petra, Nisibis (a key strategic fortified city more important in trading terms after the destruction of Palmyra), Amida, Gerasa (Jerash), Singara (heavily fortified by the Romans), Carrhae (Harran), Callinicum (Raqqa, a trade centre), Gordyene and Hatra, which had been heavily fortified

by the Parthians.(278) More widely, Merv, Petra, Zeugma, Antioch, Seleucia-on-the-Tigris, and Damascus formed part of extensive east-west trade networks.(279)

### **The Characterisation of Parthian and Persian Power**

The Romans only gradually recognised the real power of the Parthians, at first admitting their military prowess but arguing that they lacked the good governance needed to hold and occupy Roman territory for any more than a short period.(280) In part, such negative projections were drawn as opposites to the Roman view of themselves as pre-eminently suited to the art of government.(281) By the end of the third century these comforting stereotypes had come under increasing pressure but had not been overcome. In 299, when the victorious Diocletian and Galerius were negotiating terms with the Persians, the King's minister, Apharban, apparently suggested that 'The Roman and Persian monarchies . . . are the twin eyes of the world, and it would be a sad disfigurement if either of them were ever put out.'(282)

The Romans were less inclined to be generous. During the fourth century the Persians were viewed with a grudging admiration as strong and usually disciplined warriors, but were also judged as addicted to stratagem and secrecy.(283) Julian's motivations for his eastern campaign were given as 'knowing from experience as well as report that for almost sixty years this fierce people had stamped cruel evidence of carnage and rapine upon the East and had often utterly annihilated our armies'.(284) In the rhetorical speech put in Julian's mouth in the history of Ammianus Marcellinus we find the Persians referred to as a 'pernicious people' lifted to the level of Carthage as a grand enemy of Rome, while elsewhere Julian speaks of their 'power and arrogance'.(285) Their King was addicted to the 'delights of rapine.' and described as the 'most merciless of men' and as that 'monster of guile'.(286) Julian himself would praise Constantius in the following terms, conflating the current Persian dynasty with the Parthians: -

You often crossed the Tigris with your army and spent a long time in the enemy's country, but you always returned crowned with the laurels of victory. Then you visited the cities you had freed, and bestowed on them peace and plenty, all possible blessings and all at once. Thus at your hands they received what they had so long desired, the defeat of the barbarians and the erection of trophies of victory over the treachery and cowardice of the Parthians. Treachery they had displayed when they violated the treaties and broke the peace, cowardice when they lacked the courage to fight for their country and all that they held dear.(287)

The Persians were also viewed as 'wallowing in wealth', while Persian women, we are told, were 'renowned for their beauty'.(288) The men, too, were noted for their vanity and the nobles 'frequently used cosmetics and painted their faces, and all ranks wore long beards and often had their tonsure dressed in curls or otherwise elaborately styled.'(289) The Roman image of Persian indulgence is recorded in detail by Ammianus Marcellinus: -

Most Persians are inordinately addicted to the pleasures of sex, and find even a large number of concubines hardly enough to satisfy them; they do not practise pederasty. A man has many or few wives according to his means, and his affections, being divided between a number of objects, is lukewarm. The luxury of an elegant table and especially indulgence in drink they shun like the plague. Only the king has a set hour for dining. Apart from him every man times his meals by his stomach. . . .

They are full of empty words and talk madly and extravagantly. They are tiresomely and disgustingly boastful, and given to threats whether things are going well or ill. They are cunning, proud, and cruel, and claim the power of life and death over slaves and humble plebeians. They flay men alive, either completely or bit by bit. No servant who waits on them at table is allowed to open his mouth, speak, or spit; once the cloth is spread everyone's lips are sealed.(290)

However, Ammianus could not avoid also recognising their military abilities: -

Their military training and discipline, and their constant practice of manoeuvres and arms drill, which I have often described, make them formidable even to large armies. They rely especially



on their cavalry in which all their mobility and men of mark serve. Their infantry are armed like gladiators, and obey orders like soldiers' servants. . . . This nation, so bold and well exercised in martial arts, would have set its yoke on many peoples beside those which it has fully subdued, had it not been constantly harassed by domestic and foreign wars.(291)

There was in reality a degree of mirroring and mutual influence across these borders. Parthian and Persian tactics forced the Romans to develop their only heavy cavalry and extend their logistic resources in the east, but by the third century the secure limits of imperial control and power had been well established. Roman legions could readily invade but not hold Mesopotamia - the exploits of Alexander were not to be repeated by Roman emperors. Lastly, the great prestige of Parthian and Sasanid kings in the east was one of the factors that led to the importation of elaborate court ritual into the later Roman Empire (see further above), creating a great distance between the Emperor and 'Roman citizens', most of whom became *humiliores*, those who could be taxed and punished at will. (292)

Parthia, and then the renewed Persian Empire, would remain a powerful counter-balance, first to the eastern Roman Empire, then to the Byzantine Empire throughout the fifth and sixth centuries. The eastern frontier for the Byzantine Empire continued to be a zone of alternating fragile peace and contention: thus the Roman Emperor Justinian made a peace with Khusrau in AD 532, but in A.D. 540 Antioch was sacked, indicating another round of fragility for Rome's control of Syria, whose countryside seems to have received 'Iranian support for the local economy and protection of the villages'.(293) The sense of threat experienced during this period has been captured by the sixth century historian Procopius: -

Again, the Persians under Chosroes thrice invaded the rest of the Roman territory and razed the cities to the ground. Of the men and women they captured in the cities that they stormed and in the various country districts, some they butchered, others they carried away with them, leaving the land completely uninhabited wherever they happened to swoop. And from the time when they first invaded Colchis the destruction of Colchians, the Lazi, and the Romans has continued to this day.(294)

As Byzantium's power declined in the early seventh century, Khusrau II would sack Antioch, Damascus, and Jerusalem, temporarily carrying off the Holy Cross, and for a time secured control of most of West Asia (A.D. 611-619).(295)

These events would give the Romans in turn a religious pretext of regaining Christian religious relics and revenge for the sacking of Jerusalem, mobilising what Warwick Ball has termed an early 'Holy War'.(296) Even if the counterattack under the Emperor Heraclitus would push the Sasanians out of Asia Minor and help bring about the fall of Khusrau II and perhaps the ultimate decline of the Sasanid throne,(297) these trends left an indelible mark on Roman and Byzantine history. Images of Persia and Parthia would set up symbolic stereotypes of wealth, power and despotism that fuelled the European imagination down into the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. If the pomp, circumstance and cruelty of 'oriental' courts was partly true, e.g. the luxurious court of Khusrau II in the great palace of Ctesiphon, (298) it was also a projection of the growing reality for Roman imperial power, which could no longer be cloaked in Republican or Hellenistic forms. Gradually Rome and then Constantinople took on the mirage of an empire that claimed Christian and other providential symbols, but this remained in the end an imperfect use of power, an 'Earthly' City whose authority could never be fully legitimated by an appeal to the divine.(299)

These images would only be partly submerged by Arabic and Islamic conquests (from 650 AD), and the later Turkish intrusion into the region, that would set these Persian elements within a new context. The Byzantine Empire found Persia a 'perpetual menace',(300) at least until the rise of Islam as a geo-political force. Medieval Persia, then modern Iran, would retain the allure of a powerful and remote empire set within a foreign political and religious context. As such, Persia was one of the many 'others' that Europeans would encounter and create as Europe discovered itself as a formation distinct from Middle Eastern cultures.

Cultural difference, however, does not exclude areas of commonality, as noted by Michael Seymour:

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As a cultural resource, heritage is variously used to build, support, or oppress cultural identities through difference. By the same token, however, our pasts, for all their diversity, have the power to unite and to perform a very basic and very positive function of mass culture to remind us of our common humanity. . . . Recent generations of scholars have worked to show the value of difference of all kinds and to establish that the world cannot be reduced to a bland homogeneity, far less one whose agenda is determined by the world's tiny socioeconomic elite. They have been right to do so: our world histories have been guilty of prejudice on the basis of sex, gender, ethnicity, nationality, class, religion and language. But life is not only difference. It is one thing to be forced into a totalitarian homogenizing schema and quite another to celebrate common ground; the latter holds the same liberating potential as the affirmation of self that is the core of theories of difference.(301)

This image of the Persian 'other' was tinged with exotic features and driven by an orientalist need both to explore the 'forbidden' as well as assert, in the final analysis, European supremacy.

Historically the gateways to appreciate Persian and Parthian culture were limited until the modern period: these 'foreign' cultures were read through Greek, Roman, Christian or Byzantine viewpoints. However, this did not exclude the practical development of patterns of protocol and diplomacy that allowed these empires to communicate, if not really understand each other. Later on, Medieval Persia and the emerging modern state of Iran would be once again seen through the lens of European geopolitical needs and the Great Game played out between Russian and English interests. This occurred even as Iran carried forward a modified Hellenistic learning and its own unique Persian culture to influence both the Islamic and European worlds. Ironically, the lessons of power projection in the context of racial stereotyping across differing cultural regions was not always retained by Roman leaders, even after centuries of bitter experience and decades of pragmatic accommodation. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century there are even fewer excuses for failing to understand cultural frontiers as sources of threat and misinterpretation when engaging in distant wars aimed as securing some kind of global 'peace'.

## Endnotes

1. See for example HUDSON, Valerie M. (ed.) *Culture and Foreign Policy*, Boulder, Lynne Rienner, 1997; IRIYE, Akira *Cultural Internationalism and World Order*, N.Y., John Hopkins University Press, 1997; HOFSTEDE, Geert *Culture's Consequences: Comparing Values, Behaviors, Institutions, and Organizations Across Nations*, Thousand Oaks, Sage, 2001; HEROD, Andrew et al. (ed.) *An Unruly World?: Globalization, Governance and Geography*, London, Routledge, 1998; LEVITT, Peggy "Redefining the Boundaries of Belonging: the Institutional Character of Transnational Religious Life", *Sociology of Religion*, 65 no. 1, Spring 2004, pp1-18.

2. See MOJTAHED-ZADETH, Pirouz "'Boundary' in Ancient Persian Tradition of Statehood", *GeoJournal*, 62, 2005, pp51-58.

3. For one exploration of the Achaemenid 'other' that helped shape a problematic European 'identity' from the Persian Wars onwards, see DAINOTTO, Roberto Maria "A South with a View: Europe and Its Other", *Nepantla: Views from South*, 1 no. 2, 2000, pp 375-390, following a line of thought from Isocrates and Aristotle, followed through by Montesque (*Persian Letters* and *The Spirit of the Law*), to twentieth century writers such Federico Chabod and Roger Ballard. Islam and the Ottoman Empire would form two key 'others' or antitheses for the European historical imagination, followed, ironically, by an 'orientalisation' of a 'libidinous' southern Europe and Mediterranean. Ibid. Indeed, generally in Roman thought Persians, Parthians and Medes were not clearly distinguished but linked in one stereotype, BALL, Warwick *Rome in the East: The Transformation of an Empire*, London, Routledge, 1999, p9; HORNBLLOWER, Simon "Greeks and Persians: West Against East", in HEUSER, Beatrice (ed.) *War, Peace*, Florence KY, Routledge, 2001, p55 (see further below).

4. See for example, MEYER, Karl E. & BRYSAK, Shareen Blair *Tournament of Shadows: The Great Game and Race for Empire in Central Asia*, Counterpoint, 1999; RASHID, Ahmed "The New Struggle in Central Asia: A Primer for the Baffled", *World Policy Journal*, 17 no. 4, Winter 2000, pp33-45.

5. Most recently, see STULBERG, Adam N. Moving Beyond the Great Game: The Geoeconomics of Russia's Influence in the Caspian Energy Bonanza", *Geopolitics*, 10, 2005, pp1-25.

6. In fact this was a common tactic of horse archers of the Central Asian region, see an Achaemenid seal and a frieze fragment of a Parthian archer, YARSHATER, E. (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Iran, Vol. 3 (1): The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Periods*, Cambridge, CUP, 1983, Plate 34 & KEALL, E.J. "After Alexander", in COTTERELL, Arthur (ed.) *The Encyclopedia of Ancient Civilizations*, London, Windward, 1980, pp156-158. The tactic was retained by the fourth century Persians, and described by Ammianus Marcellinus (25.1) thus: 'Their forte is fighting at long range, and if they see their forces giving ground they deter the enemy from pursuit by discharging a rain of arrows backward as they withdraw.' This was part of complex tactical use of light and heavy cavalry, including the heavily armoured, the *clibanarii*, KURZ, Otto "Cultural Relations Between Parthia and Rome", in YARSHATER, E. (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Iran, Vol. 3 (1): The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Periods*, Cambridge, CUP, 1983, pp561-562; FRYE, Richard N. *The Heritage of Persia*, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1962, p196; BENNETT, Julian *Trajan Optimus Princeps: A Life and Times*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1997, p186. For graffiti of horse archers and *clibanari* at Dura Europos, see ROSTOVITZEFF, Mikhail Ivanovich *Caravan Cities*, translated by D. and T. Talbot Rice,

Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1932, pp194-195, figures 2 & 3.

7. BALL, Warwick *Rome in the East: The Transformation of an Empire*, London, Routledge, 1999, p13. See also CAMPBELL, Brian "War and Diplomacy: Rome and Parthia, 31 BC-AD 235", in RICH, John (ed.) *War and Society in the Roman World*, London, Routledge, 1993, p213; KEAVENEY, Arthur "The King and the War-Lords: Romano-Parthian Relations Circa 64-53 B.C.", *American Journal of Philology*, 103 no. 4, Winter 1982, p412.

8. See Tacitus *Annals* XV12-15. For views of Parthia as a great power but one needing peace with Rome, see Josephus *Jewish War* II.377-396. This claim of equality would concern imperial Romans when contending with Persian 'overconfidence' in the third century A.D., ADLER, William "Sextus Julius Africanus and the Roman Near East in the Third Century", *Journal of Theological Studies*, 55 no. 2, October 2004, p523.

9. See MATTERN, Susan P. *Rome and the Enemy: Imperial Strategy in the Principate*, Ewing, NJ, University of California Press, 2002, p66. Though decentralised, with relatively loose control of Mesopotamia and Iran, and Characene and Elymais becoming virtually autonomous through the 1<sup>st</sup> century A.D., this does not rule out the term 'empire' when discussing Parthian control of the wider region, as noted in WENKE, Robert J. "Elymeans, Parthians, and the Evolution of Empires in Southwestern Iran", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 101 no. 3, July-September 1981, pp303-315, contra KEALL, E.J. "Parthian Nippur and Volagases' Southern Strategy: A Hypothesis", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 95 no. 4, October-December 1975, p620. See further WENKE, Robert J. "Elymeans, Parthians, and the Evolution of Empires in Southwestern Iran", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 101 no. 3, July-September 1981, pp303-315.

10. BROWNING, Robert *The Emperor Julian*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975, p188.

11. For the difficulty in balancing these different strategic zones, and for rather reactive Roman policy that continued down through the third century, see SOUTHERN, Pat *Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, Florence KY, Routledge, 2001, pp2-4, pp12-13.

12. BALL, Warwick *Rome in the East: The Transformation of an Empire*, London, Routledge, 1999, pp8-13; CAMPBELL, Brian "War and Diplomacy: Rome and Parthia, 31 BC-AD 235", in RICH, John (ed.) *War and Society in the Roman World*, London, Routledge, 1993, p233. For early Roman rebuffs to claims of Parthian prestige from 92 B.C. onwards, see below.

13. See further HORNBLOWER, Simon "Greeks and Persians: West Against East", in HEUSER, Beatrice (ed.) *War, Peace*, Florence KY, Routledge, 2001, pp48-61.

14. *Ibid.*, p50.

15. For descriptions of these encounters and their politics, see BURN, Robert Andrew *Persia and the Greeks: The Defence of the West, C. 546- 478 B.C.*, N.Y., St. Martin's Press, 1962, pp450-475; GREEN, Peter *The Greco-Persian Wars*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1996.

16. Lloyd-Jones, Hugh *The Justice of Zeus*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1971, pp60-3. See accounts such as Herodotus *Histories* VI.19 & VIII.54-55; Thucydides *The Peloponnesian War* II.15.

17. See Aeschylus *The Persians* 800-837 where the speech of the ghost of Darius underlines the rashness of the invasion, and specifically mentions the sacrilegious destruction of temples, altars, and the statues of gods.

18. Aeschylus *The Persians* 176-214, 511-835; Lloyd-Jones, Hugh *The Justice of Zeus*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1971, pp88-9. From the other point of view, this interpretation shows the later pride and confidence of the Athenians in face of events that almost destroyed their city entirely.

19. HORNBLOWER, Simon "Greeks and Persians: West Against East", in HEUSER, Beatrice (ed.) *War, Peace*, Florence KY, Routledge, 2001, pp57-58. Roman writers such as Cicero tended to present Roman campaigns as either defensive or in support of allies, FOGEL, Jerise "Cosmopolitanism and the Colonizing Imagination in Ancient Rome", *Intertexts*, 7 no. 2, 2003, p190 (see further below). For rhetorical and values-based claims as a driver of Roman imperial conquest, see RUTLEDGE, Steven H. "Tacitus in Tartan: Textual Colonization and Expansionist Discourse in the *Agricola*", *Helios*, 27 no. 1, Spring 2000, pp75-95.

20. See the graphic accounts in ancient sources such as Arrian *Anabasis* I.8.8; Diodorus XVII.13.6 and Plutarch *Alexander* 11.

21. For example, in spite of later Greek and Egyptian propaganda against Persian kings such as Cambyses (see Diodorus I 44.3; I 49.5; X 14.3; Herodotus *Histories* III.16; III 27-38), it is possible that the Persian King Cambyses indeed did allow the Egyptians a high degree of freedom in religious affairs, POSENER, G. *La première domination Perse en Égypte*, Cairo, IFAO, 1936, p168; DANDAMAEV, M.A. *A Political History of The Achaemenid Empire*, trans. W. Vogelsang, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1989, p78, pp81-2. See further FRYE, Richard N. *Persia*, London, George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1968, pp25-26; MOJTAMED-ZADETH, Pirouz "Boundary' in Ancient Persian Tradition of Statehood", *GeoJournal*, 62, 2005, pp52-53. For the positive reception of the Parthian ruler Pakores in Syria until his death in 37 B.C., see BALL, Warwick *Rome in the East: The Transformation of an Empire*, London, Routledge, 1999, p15.

22. FRYE, Richard N. *Persia*, London, George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1968, p27.

23. See in detail LEWIS, D.M. *Sparta and Persia*, Leiden, E.J. Brill, 1977.

24. HORNBLOWER, Simon "Greeks and Persians: West Against East", in HEUSER, Beatrice (ed.) *War, Peace*, Florence KY, Routledge, 2001, p49; BALCER, J.M. "The Greeks and the Persians: The Process of Acculturation", *Historia*, 32, 1983, pp257-67.

25. BALCER, J.M. "The Greeks and the Persians: The Process of Acculturation", *Historia*, 32, 1983, pp257-67; FREDRICKSMEYER, E.A. "On the Final Aims of Philip II", in Adams, W. Lindsay & Borza, Eugene N. (eds.) *Philip II, Alexander the Great and the Macedonian Heritage*, Lanham, University Press of America, 1982, pp93-94; ROSTOVITZ, M. *The Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World*, London, OUP, 1972, Vol. I, p127. Contra the general statement in BALSDON, J.P.V.D. "The 'Divinity' of Alexander", *Historia*, 1, 1950, p375. For the sizeable number of Greek artists and sculptures who influenced Achaemenid art, see RICHTER, G.M.A. "Greeks in Persia", *American Journal of Archaeology*, 1, 1946, pp15-30.

26. See Herodotus *Histories* VI.19; VIII.54-55; Thucydides II.15; WHEELER, Mortimer *Flames Over Persepolis: Turning-Point in History*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968, p46; The Greek accounts, of course, need to be treated with caution since they largely reflect the demands of Greek historiography and its view of the Persians. Though temples were destroyed on the Acropolis, this type of action was not characteristic of Persian commanders, who usually respected

sacred sites, HORNBLOWER, Simon "Greeks and Persians: West Against East", in HEUSER, Beatrice (ed.) *War, Peace*, Florence KY, Routledge, 2001, p53. Greek forces during the Ionian revolt had burned a temple of the native goddess Cybele at Sardis, then under Persian control. This was one of the few justifications in religious terms that the Persians would have had for the destruction of Greek temples during the invasion of the mainland, see Herodotus *Histories* V.102.

27. Polybius *Histories* III.6.

28. See for example TARN, W.W. *Alexander the Great, Volume I*, Cambridge, CUP, 1979. These issues are contested in BADIAN, E. "Alexander the Great and the Unity of Mankind", *Historia*, 7, 1958, pp425-444. For Alexander in this positive light, see Plutarch *Moralia* 326D and Strabo XV.1.64.

29. See Arrian *Anabasis* III.18.12 & Quintus Curtius Rufus *The History of Alexander* V.7.1-12.

30. For these and related issues, see BOSWORTH, A.B. *Alexander and the East: The Tragedy of Triumph*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1996. Thus in the *Karnamik-I-Ardashir*, (*The Records of Ardashir*), *Book I*, we hear of the 'evil reign of Alexander' (available at <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/ardashir.html>, sourced from Charles F. Horne, ed., *The Sacred Books and Early Literature of the East*, New York, Parke, Austin, & Lipscomb, 1917, Vol. VII: *Ancient Persia*, pp225-253).

31. YARSHATER, Ehsan "Iranian National History", in YARSHATER, E. (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Iran, Vol. 3 (1): The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Periods*, Cambridge, CUP, 1983, p474.

32. BALL, Warwick *Rome in the East: The Transformation of an Empire*, London, Routledge, 1999, p28.

33. See BOSWORTH, A.B. "Alexander and the Iranians", *JHS*, 100, 1980, pp1-21; HAMMOND, N.G.L. *The Genius of Alexander the Great*, London, Duckworth, 1997, pp123-125, pp187-188.

34. As has been argued for by HOGARTH, D.G. "The Deification of Alexander the Great", *English Historical Review*, 1887, p319; TARN, W. W. *Alexander the Great, Volume I*, Cambridge, CUP, 1979, pp137-140.

35. YARSHATER, Ehsan "Iranian National History", in YARSHATER, E. (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Iran, Vol. 3 (1): The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Periods*, Cambridge, CUP, 1983, p377; STONEMAN, Richard (trans.) *The Greek Alexander Romance*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1991, p2. The Greek version of the Alexander Romance would also claim that one of Alexander's wives, Roxane, was the daughter of Darius, though in fact she was usually represented as a Sogdian princess, STONEMAN, Richard (trans.) *The Greek Alexander Romance*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1991, p1. For other claims of legitimacy, see STONEMAN, Richard (trans.) *The Greek Alexander Romance*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1991, II.21. The Alexander Romance in later translations would influence the Persian epics of Nizami (1140-1203) and Firdausi (941-1019), *Ibid.*, p7.

36. YARSHATER, Ehsan "Iranian National History", in YARSHATER, E. (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Iran, Vol. 3 (1): The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Periods*, Cambridge, CUP, 1983, p410. For some of these images in Persian, Arabic and India traditions, see PILLAI, N. Gopala "Skanda: The Alexander Romance in India", from the *Proceedings of the All-India Oriental Conference*, Vol. IX, Trivandrum, Government Press, 1937, pp955-997 [Internet Access at <http://murugan.org/research/gopalapillai.htm>].

37. YARSHATER, Ehsan "Iranian National History", in YARSHATER, E. (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Iran, Vol. 3 (1): The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Periods*, Cambridge, CUP, 1983, p405. See for example see *Karnamik-I-Ardashir*, or *The Records of Ardashir*, Chapter I, sourced from Charles F. Horne, ed., *The Sacred Books and Early Literature of the East*, New York, Parke, Austin, & Lipscomb, 1917, Vol. VII, pp. 225-253 [Internet Access at <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/ardashir.html>].

38. YARSHATER, Ehsan "Iranian National History", in YARSHATER, E. (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Iran, Vol. 3 (1): The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Periods*, Cambridge, CUP, 1983, p472.

39. BALL, Warwick *Rome in the East: The Transformation of an Empire*, London, Routledge, 1999, p8.

40. See BADIAN, E. "Alexander the Great and the Unity of Mankind", *Historia*, 7, 1958, pp425-444; BOSWORTH, A.B. *Alexander and the East: The Tragedy of Triumph*, Oxford, Clarendon, 1996; BOSWORTH, A.B. *Conquest and Empire: The Reign of Alexander the Great*, Cambridge, CUP, 1988; GREEN, Peter *Alexander of Macedon, 356-323 B.C.*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 1991; O'BRIEN, John Maxwell *Alexander the Great: The Invisible Enemy - A Biography*, London, Routledge, 1992.

41. There is, of course, much truth in these myths, with Greco-Roman culture becoming major resources Medieval and Renaissance culture. For one problematic effort to extend these sources to African roots, see the controversial BERNAL, Martin *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilisation*, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1987. For the dilemmas this placed on classical and ancient history teachers, see LEFKOWITZ, Mary R. & ROGERS, Guy MacLean (eds) *Black Athena Revisited*, Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1996, pp3-5.

42. The name of the Sasanid (or Sassanid) dynasty was derived from the grandfather of Adashir, transcribed as Sasan or Sassan, SOUTHERN, Pat *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, London, Routledge, 2001, p230.

43. In 529 A.D. the Platonic philosophers of Athens packed up and went to Persia, going to the centre of learning at Jundisapur, and probably influenced the medical school that thrived there, see FRYE, Richard N. *The Golden Age of Persia: Arabs in the East*, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1975, p22. This was one of the sources for later Arabic learning: -

"The Arabs themselves acquired their knowledge of Greek science from two sources. Most of it they eventually learned directly from the Greeks of the Byzantine Empire, but their first knowledge of it came at second hand from the Syriac speaking Nestorian Christians of Eastern Persia. During the 6th and 7th centuries Nestorian Christians at their centre of Jundishapur translated most of the important works of Greek science into Syriac, which had replaced Greek as the literary language of Western Asia since the 3rd century. For a time after the Arab conquests Jundishapur continued to be the first scientific and medical centre of Islam, and there Christian, Jewish and other subjects of the Caliphs worked on the translation of texts from Syriac into Arabic. The centre of this work later moved to Damascus and then in the early 9th century to Baghdad, where translations were also made direct from Greek. By the 10th century nearly all the texts of Greek science that were to become known to the Western world were available in Arabic." (Crombie, A.C. *Augustine to Galileo: The History of Science, A.D. 400-*

44. For some of these views, see AHRARI, M. Ehsan "Iran, China and Russia: The Emerging Anti-US Nexus", *Security Dialogue*, 32 no. 4, December 2001, pp453-466; PRESCOTT, John "Iran Poses New Threat to Shipping, US Warns", *Lloyd's List Australian Weekly*, 5 February 1996, p15; RITCHESON, Philip L. "Iranian Military Resurgence: Scope, Motivations, and Implications for Regional Security", *Armed Forces and Society*, 21 no. 4, Summer 1995, pp573-592. For political mis-perceptions of the past used politically, see further SEYMOUR, Michael "Ancient Mesopotamia and Modern Iraq in the British Press, 1980-2003", *Current Anthropology*, 45 no. 3, June 2004, pp351-368.

45. For constitutional limits monitored by the Council of Guardians, see SAMII, A. William "Iran's Guardians Council as an Obstacle to Democracy", *The Middle East Journal*, 55 no. 4, Autumn 2001, pp643-662.

46. BIVAR, A.D.H. "The Political History of Iran Under the Arsacids", in YARSHATER, E. (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Iran, Vol. 3 (1): The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Periods*, Cambridge, CUP, 1983, pp28-31; FRYE, Richard N. *The Heritage of Persia*, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1962, pp180-181.

47. LERNER, Jeffrey D. *The Impact of Seleucid Decline on the Eastern Iranian Plateau*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1999, pp12-13, p17, p30, p33, following Strabo XI.9.3. For the debate on whether this was preceded by a local rebellion in Parthia, based on the fragments of Arrian's *Parthica* as preserved in Photius, Syncellus and Zosimus, see LERNER, Jeffrey D. *The Impact of Seleucid Decline on the Eastern Iranian Plateau*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1999, pp16-17. For alternative later datings of 240 B.C. for the Arsaces' invasion of Parthia, which may have been a rather drawn out process, see DRIJVERS, Jan Willem "Strabo on Parthia and the Parthians", in WIESEHÖFER, Josef (ed.) *Das Partherreich und Seine Zeugnisse - The Arsacid Empire: Sources and Documentation*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1998, pp283-284.

48. See LERNER, Jeffrey D. *The Impact of Seleucid Decline on the Eastern Iranian Plateau*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1999, p46, following Justin XLI.5.1-6. All early Parthia kings took on the throne name of Arsaces, regardless of their individual name, or whether or not they were direct descendants of Arsaces I. For a likely reconstruction of the royal family tree, see LERNER, Jeffrey D. *The Impact of Seleucid Decline on the Eastern Iranian Plateau*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1999, p28.

49. DRIJVERS, Jan Willem "Strabo on Parthia and the Parthians", in WIESEHÖFER, Josef (ed.) *Das Partherreich und Seine Zeugnisse - The Arsacid Empire: Sources and Documentation*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1998, p285.

50. It was recognised that this was a slow process that took up to eighty years, KURT, Amélia "Concluding Remarks", in WIESEHÖFER, Josef (ed.) *Das Partherreich und Seine Zeugnisse - The Arsacid Empire: Sources and Documentation*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1998, p531. However, though not tightly centralised, Parthian control seems to have been more than a 'hegemony', contra KEALL, E.J. "After Alexander", in COTTERELL, Arthur (ed.) *The Encyclopedia of Ancient Civilizations*, London, Windward, 1980, p157 (see further above).

51. KEALL, E.J. "After Alexander", in COTTERELL, Arthur (ed.) *The Encyclopedia of Ancient Civilizations*, London, Windward, 1980, p157.

52. LERNER, Jeffrey D. *The Impact of Seleucid Decline on the Eastern Iranian Plateau*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1999, p11.

53. RAWLINSON, George P. *The Story of Parthia*, N.Y., G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1893, p27. See The Behistun inscription DB Column 1.6 (= 1,12-17); Column 2.21 (= 2.5-8); Column 2.35. (= 2.92-8) ; Column 3.36-37 (= 3.1-10) [Searched at *Old Persian Texts* at <http://www.avesta.org/op/op.htm>]. See further the translation in KENT, R.G.K. *Old Persian: Grammar, Texts*, Lexicon, New Haven, 1953.

54. BIVAR, A.D.H. "The Political History of Iran Under the Arsacids", in YARSHATER, E. (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Iran, Vol. 3 (1): The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Periods*, Cambridge, CUP, 1983, p27; RAWLINSON, George P. *The Story of Parthia*, N.Y., G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1893, p29; LERNER, Jeffrey D. *The Impact of Seleucid Decline on the Eastern Iranian Plateau*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1999, p17, footnote 31; CURTISS, Vesta S "The Parthian Costume and Headdress", in WIESEHÖFER, Josef (ed.) *Das Partherreich und Seine Zeugnisse - The Arsacid Empire: Sources and Documentation*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1998, p66.

55. LERNER, Jeffrey D. *The Impact of Seleucid Decline on the Eastern Iranian Plateau*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1999, p29.

56. RAWLINSON, George P. *The Story of Parthia*, N.Y., G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1893, p33.

57. *Ibid.*, p47.

58. *Ibid.*, p35.

59. DRIJVERS, Jan Willem "Strabo on Parthia and the Parthians", in WIESEHÖFER, Josef (ed.) *Das Partherreich und Seine Zeugnisse - The Arsacid Empire: Sources and Documentation*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1998, pp285-286. See further CAMPBELL, Brian "War and Diplomacy: Rome and Parthia, 31 BC-AD 235", in RICH, John (ed.) *War and Society in the Roman World*, London, Routledge, 1993, p218, following Reynolds, Joyce *Aphrodisias and Rome: Documents from the Excavation of the Theatre at Aphrodisias*, London, Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies, 1982, nos. 17.10 & 18.2.

60. Strabo I.1.17.

61. DRIJVERS, Jan Willem "Strabo on Parthia and the Parthians", in WIESEHÖFER, Josef (ed.) *Das Partherreich und Seine Zeugnisse - The Arsacid Empire: Sources and Documentation*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1998, p286, following Ammianus Marcellinus 23.6.43; WALLACE-HADRILL, Andrew "Introduction", in AMMIANUS MARCELLINUS *The Later Roman Empire (A.D. 354-378)*, trans. by Walter Hamilton, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1986, p32.

62. DRIJVERS, Jan Willem "Strabo on Parthia and the Parthians", in WIESEHÖFER, Josef (ed.) *Das Partherreich und Seine Zeugnisse - The Arsacid Empire: Sources and Documentation*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1998, p291.

63. KURT, Amélia "Concluding Remarks", in WIESEHÖFER, Josef (ed.) *Das Partherreich und Seine Zeugnisse - The Arsacid Empire: Sources and Documentation*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1998, p529. See further Strabo 17.1.19; Josephus *Jewish War* I.261 & I.276; CAMPBELL, Brian "War and Diplomacy: Rome and Parthia, 31 BC-AD 235", in RICH, John (ed.) *War and Society in the Roman World*, London, Routledge, 1993, p218. Likewise, Biblical

images of Assyrian and Babylonian kings may have helped later European narratives concerning modern Iraq, only gradually being dismantled in the public media, see SEYMOUR, Michael "Ancient Mesopotamia and Modern Iraq in the British Press, 1980-2003", *Current Anthropology*, 45 no. 3, June 2004, p352, p357-360.

64. Ammianus Marcellinus 18.10.

65. INVERNIZZI, Antonio "Parthian Nisa: New Lines of Research", in WIESEHÖFER, Josef (ed.) *Das Partherreich und Seine Zeugnisse - The Arsacid Empire: Sources and Documentation*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1998, p47. See also BALL, Warwick *Rome in the East: The Transformation of an Empire*, London, Routledge, 1999, p12; WENKE, Robert J. "Elymeans, Parthians, and the Evolution of Empires in Southwestern Iran", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 101 no. 3, July-September 1981, p303. This trend was also noted several decades before, see ROSTOVITZ, Mikhail Ivanovich *Caravan Cities*, translated by D. and T. Talbot Rice, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1932, p97.

66. GHIRSHMAN, R.B. *Iran from the Earliest Times to the Islamic Conquest*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1954, pp243-245; INVERNIZZI, Antonio "Parthian Nisa: New Lines of Research", in WIESEHÖFER, Josef (ed.) *Das Partherreich und Seine Zeugnisse - The Arsacid Empire: Sources and Documentation*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1998, p45; DRIJVERS, Jan Willem "Strabo on Parthia and the Parthians", in WIESEHÖFER, Josef (ed.) *Das Partherreich und Seine Zeugnisse - The Arsacid Empire: Sources and Documentation*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1998, p288; BIVAR, A.D.H. "The Political History of Iran Under the Arsacids", in YARSHATER, E. (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Iran, Vol. 3 (1): The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Periods*, Cambridge, CUP, 1983, p86; KEALL, E.J. "After Alexander", in COTTERELL, Arthur (ed.) *The Encyclopedia of Ancient Civilizations*, London, Windward, 1980, p159; FRYE, Richard N. *The Heritage of Persia*, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1962, pp182-184. For motives in founding Vologasias, see KEALL, E.J. "Parthian Nippur and Volagases' Southern Strategy: A Hypothesis", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 95 no. 4, October-December 1975, p625. See further Strabo XVI.1.16. For possible remnants of Hellenistic institutions and feeling in Seleucia in the first century A.D., see Tacitus *Annals* VI.41-42.

67. LERNER, Jeffrey D. *The Impact of Seleucid Decline on the Eastern Iranian Plateau*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1999, p45.

68. GHIRSHMAN, R.B. *Iran from the Earliest Times to the Islamic Conquest*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1954, p246; WROTH, Warwick *Catalogue of the Coins of Parthia*, Bologna, Arnaldo Forni, 1964, pxxv, pxxvi, pxxvii, xxxiii. For examples of these coins, see BIVAR, A.D.H. "The Political History of Iran Under the Arsacids", in YARSHATER, E. (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Iran, Vol. 3 (1): The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Periods*, Cambridge, CUP, 1983, p42; SELLWOOD, David "Parthian Coins", in YARSHATER, E. (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Iran, Vol. 3 (1): The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Periods*, Cambridge, CUP, 1983, p282, pp285-291. One short-term holder of the Parthian throne, Tiridates, in 26 B.C. struck a coin which added a term indicating that he was a 'Romanophile', thereby noting his friendship with, and support from, the Romans, SELLWOOD, David "Parthian Coins", in YARSHATER, E. (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Iran, Vol. 3 (1): The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Periods*, Cambridge, CUP, 1983, p292; SCHOFF, Wilfred H. "Commentary" to ISIDORE OF CHARAX *Parthian Stations of Isidore of Charax: An Account of the Overland Route Between the Levant and India in the First Century B.C.*, trans. by Wilfred H. Schoff, Chicago, Ares Publishers, 1989, p20.

69. INVERNIZZI, Antonio "Parthian Nisa: New Lines of Research", in WIESEHÖFER, Josef (ed.) *Das Partherreich und Seine Zeugnisse - The Arsacid Empire: Sources and Documentation*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1998, p47, pp50-53; LERNER, Jeffrey D. *The Impact of Seleucid Decline on the Eastern Iranian Plateau*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1999, p26; KURT, Amélia "Concluding Remarks", in WIESEHÖFER, Josef (ed.) *Das Partherreich und Seine Zeugnisse - The Arsacid Empire: Sources and Documentation*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1998, p532.

70. See PORADA, Edith et al. "The Art of the Parthians", *Iranian Visual Arts*, Iran Chamber Society, 2001-2004 [Internet Access via [www.iranchamber.com](http://www.iranchamber.com)].

71. LERNER, Jeffrey D. *The Impact of Seleucid Decline on the Eastern Iranian Plateau*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1999, p88.

72. FRYE, Richard N. *Persia*, London, George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1968, pp39-40; REDGATE, A. E. *The Armenians*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2000, p105, p221. For the love of music, poetry and luxury in some later Sassanid courts, see FRYE, Richard N. "The Political History of Iran Under the Sasanians", in YARSHATER, E. (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Iran, Vol. 3 (1): The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Periods*, Cambridge, CUP, 1983, p171.

73. BIVAR, A.D.H. "The Political History of Iran Under the Arsacids", in YARSHATER, E. (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Iran, Vol. 3 (1): The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Periods*, Cambridge, CUP, 1983, p23; FRYE, Richard N. *The Heritage of Persia*, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1962, p245; FRYE, Richard N. *Persia*, London, George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1968, p45.

74. LANG, David M. "Iran, Armenia and Georgia", in YARSHATER, E. (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Iran, Vol. 3 (1): The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Periods*, Cambridge, CUP, 1983, p536.

75. CAMPBELL, Brian "War and Diplomacy: Rome and Parthia, 31 BC-AD 235", in RICH, John (ed.) *War and Society in the Roman World*, London, Routledge, 1993, p213.

76. MOJTAMED-ZADEH, Pirouz "'Boundary' in Ancient Persian Tradition of Statehood", *GeoJournal*, 62, 2005, p54. See further LEPPER, F.A. *Trajan's Parthian War*, Wesport, Greenwood Press, 1979, p145; ROSTOVITZ, Mikhail Ivanovich *Caravan Cities*, translated by D. and T. Talbot Rice, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1932, p140.

77. DRIJVERS, Jan Willem "Strabo on Parthia and the Parthians", in WIESEHÖFER, Josef (ed.) *Das Partherreich und Seine Zeugnisse - The Arsacid Empire: Sources and Documentation*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1998, p287, commenting on Strabo 11.9.2 (515C).

78. BALL, Warwick *Rome in the East: The Transformation of an Empire*, London, Routledge, 1999, p9; SOUTHERN, Pat *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, London, Routledge, 2001, p227.

79. See LEPPER, F.A. *Trajan's Parthian War*, Wesport, Greenwood Press, 1979, p121; OATES, David "The Roman Frontier in Northern Iraq", *Geographical Journal*, 122 no. 2, June 1956, p193.

80. HEICHELHEIM, Fritz M. & YEO, Cedric A. *A History of the Roman People*, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall, 1962, p196. It has been argued that Armenia came to be viewed as within the Roman sphere of interest, but that it was not consistently viewed or used as a buffer state in Roman policy, see CAMPBELL, Brian "War and Diplomacy: Rome and Parthia, 31 BC-AD 235", in RICH, John (ed.) *War and Society in the Roman World*, London, Routledge, 1993, pp220-221.

81. GHIRSHMAN, R.B. *Iran from the Earliest Times to the Islamic Conquest*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1954, p250. See Appian *The Mithridatic Wars* XII.III.15 & Plutarch *Sulla* 5. For Sulla's low regard for the Parthian envoys, in contrast to China's positive treatment of a Parthian embassy, see BALL, Warwick *Rome in the East: The Transformation of an Empire*, London, Routledge, 1999, p13; CAMPBELL, Brian "War and Diplomacy: Rome and Parthia, 31 BC-AD 235", in RICH, John (ed.) *War and Society in the Roman World*, London, Routledge, 1993, p214. For Rome's desire to use Armenia to check the power of Pontus and Parthia, see REDGATE, A. E. *The Armenians*, Oxford, Blackwell, Publishing, 2000, p69, p81.
82. See KEAVENEY, Arthur "Roman Treaties with Parthia circa 95 - circa 64 B.C.", *American Journal of Philology*, 102 no. 2, Summer 1991, pp196-197.
83. For this motivation in the case of Sulla, see Appian *The Mithridatic Wars* XII.IX.64.
84. HEICHELHEIM, Fritz M. & YEO, Cedric A. *A History of the Roman People*, Englewood Cliffs, Prentice Hall, 1962, p201.
85. BIVAR, A.D.H. "The Political History of Iran Under the Arsacids", in YARSHATER, E. (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Iran, Vol. 3 (1): The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Periods*, Cambridge, CUP, 1983, p46; GHIRSHMAN, R.B. *Iran from the Earliest Times to the Islamic Conquest*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1954, p251. Appian states that Parthia entered into secret agreements with both sides, but helped neither, Appian *The Mithridatic Wars* XII.XIII.87.
86. Appian *The Mithridatic Wars* XII.XIII.90.
87. SCULLARD, H.H. *From the Gracchi to Nero: A History of Rome 133 B.C. - A.D. 68*, London, Methuen, 1966, p105.
88. For one ancient account of Mithridates' immunity to poisons, see Appian *The Mithridatic Wars* XII.XVI.111.
89. BIVAR, A.D.H. "The Political History of Iran Under the Arsacids", in YARSHATER, E. (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Iran, Vol. 3 (1): The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Periods*, Cambridge, CUP, 1983, p47; SCULLARD, H.H. *From the Gracchi to Nero: A History of Rome 133 B.C. - A.D. 68*, London, Methuen, 1966, p106. See further KEAVENEY, Arthur "Roman Treaties with Parthia circa 95 - circa 64 B.C.", *American Journal of Philology*, 102 no. 2, Summer 1991, pp208-209.
90. Plutarch *Pompey*, 39.
91. Josephus *Jewish Antiquities* XIV.72. For a view of the inner shrine as empty, see Tacitus *Histories* V.9.
92. For later administrative changes see MILLAR, Fergus, *The Roman Near East, 31 B.C.-A.D. 337.*, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1993.
93. See Appian *The Mithridatic Wars* XII.XVII.114 & 118.
94. *Ibid.*, XII.XVI.106.
95. DUDLEY, Donald *Roman Society*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1970, pp110-111.
96. GHIRSHMAN, R.B. *Iran from the Earliest Times to the Islamic Conquest*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1954, p251. For booty and slaves as a motivation for Alexander the Great's invasion of Persia, see HORNBLLOWER, Simon "Greeks and Persians: West Against East", in HEUSER, Beatrice (ed.) *War, Peace*, Florence KY, Routledge, 2001, p54.
97. BIVAR, A.D.H. "The Political History of Iran Under the Arsacids", in YARSHATER, E. (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Iran, Vol. 3 (1): The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Periods*, Cambridge, CUP, 1983, pp48-50.
98. Plutarch *Crassus* 21-31.
99. BIVAR, A.D.H. "The Political History of Iran Under the Arsacids", in YARSHATER, E. (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Iran, Vol. 3 (1): The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Periods*, Cambridge, CUP, 1983, p52.
100. KEAVENEY, Arthur "The King and the War-Lords: Romano-Parthian Relations Circa 64-53 B.C.", *American Journal of Philology*, 103 no. 4, Winter 1982, p419.
101. Plutarch *Crassus*, 20.
102. WARRY, John *Warfare in the Classical World*, London, Salamander, 1980, p154.
103. Ammianus Marcellinus 24.4; 24.6; 25.1. Perhaps better described as 'lamellar armour', thin plates laced together, see WEIR, William *Fifty Battles that Changed the World: The Conflicts That Most Influenced the Course of History*, Franklin Lakes NY, Career Press, 2001, p142.
104. Plutarch *Crassus* 24, translated in PLUTARCH *The Fall of the Roman Republic*, trans. by R. Warner, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1972. For later use of similar tactics, see WILLIAMS, Stephen *Diocletian and the Roman Recovery*, N.Y., Methuen, 1985, p80.
105. Plutarch *Crassus*, 31.
106. BIVAR, A.D.H. "The Political History of Iran Under the Arsacids", in YARSHATER, E. (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Iran, Vol. 3 (1): The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Periods*, Cambridge, CUP, 1983, pp57-58; GHIRSHMAN, R.B. *Iran from the Earliest Times to the Islamic Conquest*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1954, p253.

107. Josephus *Jewish War* I.187.
108. See Plutarch, *Caesar* 59; BIVAR, A.D.H. "The Political History of Iran Under the Arsacids", in YARSHATER, E. (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Iran, Vol. 3 (1): The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Periods*, Cambridge, CUP, 1983, p56. This was apparently part of a grand sweep that would take him into Iran via Armenia, then via southern Russia to deal with German and Gallic tribes before returning home, see BALL, Warwick *Rome in the East: The Transformation of an Empire*, London, Routledge, 1999, p14.
109. SICKER, Martin *The Pre-Islamic Middle East*, Wesport, Praeger Publishers, 2000, p155.
110. Ibid., p156.
111. Plutarch *Mark Antony*, 50.
112. Ibid., 54.
113. Cassius Dio 51.17.1; Tacitus *Histories* I.11.
114. Appian *The Syrian Wars* XI.VIII.51; MILLAR, Fergus, *The Roman Near East, 31 B.C.-A.D. 337.*, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1993, pp31-32.
115. Contra BAUSANI, Alessandro *The Persians from the Earliest Days to the Twentieth Century*, London, Elek Books, 1971.
116. Augustus *Res Gestae* 29.
117. Augustus *Res Gestae*, 27; CAMPBELL, Brian "War and Diplomacy: Rome and Parthia, 31 BC-AD 235", in RICH, John (ed.) *War and Society in the Roman World*, London, Routledge, 1993, p228; SYME, Ronald *The Roman Revolution*, Oxford, OUP, 1974, pp301-2.
118. SICKER, Martin *The Pre-Islamic Middle East*, Wesport, Praeger Publishers, 2000, p157.
119. SYME, Ronald *The Roman Revolution*, Oxford, OUP, 1974, p372.
120. Suetonius *Tiberius* 9; *Res Gestae* 27-8; Cassius Dio 54.8; CAMPBELL, Brian "War and Diplomacy: Rome and Parthia, 31 BC-AD 235", in RICH, John (ed.) *War and Society in the Roman World*, London, Routledge, 1993, p222; SYME, Ronald *The Roman Revolution*, Oxford, OUP, 1974, p388; DUDLEY, Donald *Roman Society*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1970, p158; THORLEY, John "The Development of Trade between the Roman Empire and the East under Augustus", *Greece & Rome*, 16 no. 2, 1969, p214. Standards had also been lost by Decidius Saxa in 40 B.C. and Antony circa 35-36 B.C., Cassius Dio, *The Roman History: The Reign of Augustus*, translated by Ian Scott-Kilvert, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1987, p282, 284.
121. DRIJVERS, Jan Willem "Strabo on Parthia and the Parthians", in WIESEHÖFER, Josef (ed.) *Das Partherreich und Seine Zeugnisse - The Arsacid Empire: Sources and Documentation*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1998, p290; BENNETT, Julian *Trajan Optimus Princeps: A Life and Times*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1997, p187
122. Ibid., p289, discussing Strabo XVI.1.28 (784C-749C) and VI.4.2. Iran and Armenia both had a tradition of the 'fosterage of aristocratic children', thereby reducing the risk that an entire family might be wiped out in one attack, with foster parents often then taking up the role of powerful patrons who might reinstate the family, see REDGATE, A. E. *The Armenians*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing, 2000, p105.
123. CAMPBELL, Brian "War and Diplomacy: Rome and Parthia, 31 BC-AD 235", in RICH, John (ed.) *War and Society in the Roman World*, London, Routledge, 1993, p223. See further Cassius Dio 55.10. Strabo notes that the extension of the Roman and Parthian empires allowed a great expansion of geographical knowledge, thereby implying a flow of knowledge across these two zones, Strabo I.2.1. This was the case in Josephus' account of the Jewish War, which had first been written in an Aramaic edition that circulated eastward into Parthian regions, before the Greek version, Josephus *Jewish War* 1.7 & SMALLWOOD, E. Mary "Introduction", to Josephus *The Jewish War*, translated by G.A. Williamson, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1981, p14. Other 'potential sources of information on the Parthian empire were the merchants who plied the overland trade routes to India and China, though to what degree they were used (or useful) is unclear', MATTERN, Susan P. *Rome and the Enemy: Imperial Strategy in the Principate*, Ewing, NJ, University of California Press, 2002, p35. Arrian's *Parthica*, unfortunately, has been largely lost, *ibid.*, p58.
124. CAMPBELL, Brian "War and Diplomacy: Rome and Parthia, 31 BC-AD 235", in RICH, John (ed.) *War and Society in the Roman World*, London, Routledge, 1993, pp223-224. See further ROMER, F.E. "Gaius Caesar's Military Diplomacy in the East", *Transactions of the American Philological Association*, 109, 1979, pp199-214.
125. CAMPBELL, Brian "War and Diplomacy: Rome and Parthia, 31 BC-AD 235", in RICH, John (ed.) *War and Society in the Roman World*, London, Routledge, 1993, p224.
126. See further OBER, J. "Tiberius and the Political Testament of Augustus", *Historia*, 31, 1982, pp306-328; SCHOFF, Wilfred H. "Commentary" to ISIDORE OF CHARAX *Parthian Stations of Isidore of Charax: An Account of the Overland Route Between the Levant and India in the First Century B.C.*, trans. by Wilfred H. Schoff, Chicago, Ares Publishers, 1989, p21. This should not be confused with a defensive strategic outlook, since Augustus had been willing earlier in his reign to expand frontiers along the length of the Danube, and had tried with less success to expand into Germany, CARTER, John "Introduction", to Cassius Dio, *The Roman History: The Reign of Augustus*, translated by Ian Scott-Kilvert, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1987, p17.
127. SICKER, Martin *The Pre-Islamic Middle East*, Wesport, Praeger Publishers, 2000, p157.
128. See ROSTOVITZ, Mikhail Ivanovich *Caravan Cities*, translated by D. and T. Talbot Rice, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1932, p26, p102. In the fourth century the emperor Julian would even claim that they wished reduce the cities and bring in their own colonists, *Panegyric in Honour of Constantius*, I, 27, A-B.
129. SICKER, Martin *The Pre-Islamic Middle East*, Wesport, Praeger Publishers, 2000, p161.



130. RAJAK, Tessa "The Parthians in Josephus", in WIESEHÖFER, Josef (ed.) *Das Partherreich und Seine Zeugnisse - The Arsacid Empire: Sources and Documentation*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1998, p312.
131. BIVAR, A.D.H. "The Political History of Iran Under the Arsacids", in YARSHATER, E. (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Iran, Vol. 3 (1): The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Periods*, Cambridge, CUP, 1983, p80.
132. CAMPBELL, Brian "War and Diplomacy: Rome and Parthia, 31 BC-AD 235", in RICH, John (ed.) *War and Society in the Roman World*, London, Routledge, 1993, pp220-213; LANG, David M. "Iran, Armenia and Georgia", in YARSHATER, E. (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Iran, Vol. 3 (1): The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Periods*, Cambridge, CUP, 1983, p516.
133. BALL, Warwick *Rome in the East: The Transformation of an Empire*, London, Routledge, 1999, p16. See further MILLAR, Fergus, *The Roman Near East, 31 B.C.-A.D. 337.*, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1993, p33, p437, following Strabo XVI.1.28. This de facto border may have been established as early as 31 B.C., based on coinage evidence from Zeugma, see MILLAR, Fergus, *The Roman Near East, 31 B.C.-A.D. 337.*, Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 1993, p29.
134. SICKER, Martin *The Pre-Islamic Middle East*, Wesport, Praeger Publishers, 2000, p165. For the background diplomacy, see Tacitus XV24-30.
135. RAJAK, Tessa "The Parthians in Josephus", in WIESEHÖFER, Josef (ed.) *Das Partherreich und Seine Zeugnisse - The Arsacid Empire: Sources and Documentation*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1998, p310, following Tacitus *Histories* II.82 & IV.51; Josephus *Jewish War* VII.244-51; Suetonius *Domitian* 2.2; Dio *Epitome* 66.11.3. See further GHIRSHMAN, R.B. *Iran from the Earliest Times to the Islamic Conquest*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1954, p257.
136. BENNETT, Julian *Trajan Optimus Princeps: A Life and Times*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1997, p188; LEPPER, F.A. *Trajan's Parthian War*, Wesport, Greenwood Press, 1979, p111.
137. See LEPPER, F.A. *Trajan's Parthian War*, Wesport, Greenwood Press, 1979, p178. For the early date for re-organising eastern forces, see BENNETT, Julian *Trajan Optimus Princeps: A Life and Times*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1997, p184.
138. CAMPBELL, Brian "War and Diplomacy: Rome and Parthia, 31 BC-AD 235", in RICH, John (ed.) *War and Society in the Roman World*, London, Routledge, 1993, p217. For this image of the barbarian 'enemy' as a key driver in Roman foreign policy, largely shaped by the values of the political elite, see MATTERN, Susan P. *Rome and the Enemy: Imperial Strategy in the Principate*, Ewing, NJ, University of California Press, 2002.
139. A view put forward by Gibbon in his famous *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 1776, see Volume I, p6 of the Oxford University Press 1903 edition. See also GHIRSHMAN, R.B. *Iran from the Earliest Times to the Islamic Conquest*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1954, p258; WEIR, William *Fifty Battles that Changed the World: The Conflicts That Most Influenced the Course of History*, Franklin Lakes NY, Career Press, 2001, p141; BALL, Warwick *Rome in the East: The Transformation of an Empire*, London, Routledge, 1999, p10, p24.; ROSTOVITZ, Mikhail Ivanovich *Caravan Cities*, translated by D. and T. Talbot Rice, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1932, p106 In turn, Septimius Severus may have had a 'fear' of Alexander and his myth, since he found it hard to surpass, and this emperor apparently ordered the closing of Alexander's tomb, BIRLEY, Anthony *Septimius Severus: The African Emperor*, London, Routledge, 1999, pp135-137. Indeed, the 'shadow' of Alexander as an overarching conqueror moving eastwards may be seen as late as the Crusaders and Napoleon, see BALL, Warwick *Rome in the East: The Transformation of an Empire*, London, Routledge, 1999, p8. Julian explicitly mentions Alexander's achievement and Rome's failure in this area, *The Caesars*, II, 324, C.
140. Stewart Perowne suggests that these two campaigns were connected, that Parthia and Dacia might have signed 'some sort of mutual assistance pact' and that is why he had sent Pliny as his personal legate to control the region of Bithynia, which forms a part of a possible route of communication between these two peoples, PEROWNE, Stewart *Hadrian*, London, Croom Helm, 1986, p42. This interpretation seems unlikely due to the geographical distances involved, and over-estimates Pliny's possible military role.
141. BENNETT, Julian *Trajan Optimus Princeps: A Life and Times*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1997, pp185-186; KEALL, E.J. "Parthian Nippur and Volagases' Southern Strategy: A Hypothesis", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 95 no. 4, October-December 1975, pp627-628. For criticisms of the trade theory as a major cause of Trajan's policies, see LEPPER, F.A. *Trajan's Parthian War*, Wesport, Greenwood Press, 1979, pp158-163. For possible alternative routes controlled by the Kushans from Bactria down to coastal Indian ports such as Monoglosson, as well as Characene's involvement with Roman routes, see THORLEY, John "The Roman Empire and the Kushans", *Greece & Rome*, 26 no. 2, October 1979, pp182-189; KEALL, E.J. "Parthian Nippur and Volagases' Southern Strategy: A Hypothesis", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 95 no. 4, October-December 1975, p628; SCHOFF, Wilfred H. "Some Aspects of the Overland Oriental Trade at the Christian Era", *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 35, 1915, pp31-41.
142. BIVAR, A.D.H. "The Political History of Iran Under the Arsacids", in YARSHATER, E. (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Iran, Vol. 3 (1): The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Periods*, Cambridge, CUP, 1983, p87.
143. BENNETT, Julian *Trajan Optimus Princeps: A Life and Times*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1997, pp188-191, p194.
144. ROSTOVITZ, Mikhail Ivanovich *Caravan Cities*, translated by D. and T. Talbot Rice, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1932, p33; LEPPER, F.A. *Trajan's Parthian War*, Wesport, Greenwood Press, 1979, p120, p209.
145. GHIRSHMAN, R.B. *Iran from the Earliest Times to the Islamic Conquest*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1954, p257.
146. Noted in BIVAR, A.D.H. "The Political History of Iran Under the Arsacids", in YARSHATER, E. (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Iran, Vol. 3 (1): The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Periods*, Cambridge, CUP, 1983, pp88-90.
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233. See MacMULLEN, Ramsay *Constantine*, London, Croom Helm, 1985, p221.
234. FRYE, Richard N. *The Heritage of Persia*, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1962, p199; SOUTHERN, Pat *The Roman Empire from Severus to Constantine*, London, Routledge, 2001, p231.
235. BROWN, Peter *The Making of Late Antiquity*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1978, p72. For re-weaving and re-sale of silk from Syrian cities, see THORLEY, John "The Silk Trade between China and the Roman Empire at Its Height, 'Circa' A.D. 90-130", *Greece & Rome*, 18 no. 1, April 1971, p77.
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237. Ammianus Marcellinus 18.6; 19.9; 24.7; 25.6; BROWNING, Robert *The Emperor Julian*, London, Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1975, pp207-209.
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239. RAJAK, Tessa "The Parthians in Josephus", in WIESEHÖFER, Josef (ed.) *Das Partherreich und Seine Zeugnisse - The Arsacid Empire: Sources and Documentation*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1998, pp309-324, following Josephus *Jewish Antiquities* 11.133. For links between the Hasmoneans, Herod and Parthia, see RAJAK, Tessa "The Parthians in Josephus", in WIESEHÖFER, Josef (ed.) *Das Partherreich und Seine Zeugnisse - The Arsacid Empire: Sources and Documentation*, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 1998, p311, following Josephus *Jewish War* 1.248ff; *Jewish Antiquities* 14.330ff & 15.14-21. From the first century A.D. three to four legions were usually in place in Syria, though total eastern deployments of around eleven legions were less than the forces stationed on the Rhine and Danube, with the northern frontier being in general more critical for Roman security, CAMPBELL, Brian "War and Diplomacy: Rome and Parthia, 31 BC-AD 235", in RICH, John (ed.) *War and Society in the Roman World*, London, Routledge, 1993, p225, p237; see STARR, Chester G. *The Roman Empire 27 B.C.-A.D. 476*, Oxford, OUP, 1982, p141. Dudley suggests that four legions placed in Syria were enough for defensive but not aggressive operations, DUDLEY, Donald *Roman Society*, Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1970, p169. Three or more legions might be needed in Judaea to quell revolts, see for example Tacitus *Histories* V.1.
240. See FELDMAN, Louis H. "Rabbinic Insights on the Decline and Forthcoming Fall of the Roman Empire", *Journal for the Study of Judaism: In the Persian Hellenistic & Roman Period*, 31 no. 3, August 2000, pp275-297.
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243. Ibid., p95.
244. FREND, W.H.C. *The Early Christian Church*, London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1971, p133.
245. WILLIAMS, Stephen *Diocletian and the Roman Recovery*, N.Y., Methuen, 1985, p78, p81, p83.
246. WILLIAMS, Stephen *Diocletian and the Roman Recovery*, N.Y., Methuen, 1985, pp83-84, quoting *Fontes Iuris Romani Antejustiniani*, (FIRA), 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, Florence, II, 544-589. For residual Arsacid cultural elements that may have also posed a threat to the Sasanian kings, see BIVAR, A.D.H. "The Political History of Iran Under the Arsacids", in YARSHATER, E. (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Iran, Vol. 3 (1): The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Periods*, Cambridge, CUP, 1983, p97.

247. This was most fierce under the first five Sasanid rulers, inspired by the proselytising activities of the Zoroastrian priest Kartir, KEALL, E.J. "After Alexander", in COTTERELL, Arthur (ed.) *The Encyclopedia of Ancient Civilizations*, London, Windward, 1980, p162. For the complex pattern of acculturation, resistance and cult diversification across the frontier, see ELSNER, Jas "Cultural resistance and the Visual Image: The Case of Dura Europos", *Classical Philology*, 96 no. 3, July 2001, pp269-304.
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250. VINE, Aubrey R. *The Nestorian Churches: A Concise History of Nestorian Christianity in Asia from the Persian Schism to the Modern Assyrians*, London, Independent Press, 1937, p43. See further KEALL, E.J. "After Alexander", in COTTERELL, Arthur (ed.) *The Encyclopedia of Ancient Civilizations*, London, Windward, 1980, p159. For a later episode of ecclesiastical espionage, see LEE, A.D. "Evagrius, Paul of Nisibis and the Problem of Loyalties in the Mid-Sixth Century", *The Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 44 no. 4, October 1993, pp569-585.
251. FRYE, Richard N. "The Political History of Iran Under the Sasanians", in YARSHATER, E. (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Iran, Vol. 3 (1): The Seleucid, Parthian and Sasanian Periods*, Cambridge, CUP, 1983, p145; FRYE, Richard N. *The Heritage of Persia*, London, Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1962, p224; VINE, Aubrey R. *The Nestorian Churches: A Concise History of Nestorian Christianity in Asia from the Persian Schism to the Modern Assyrians*, London, Independent Press, 1937, pp37-49.
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