Rome and Parthia:

At War and Peace.

Romano-Parthian Relations and Trade from Vespasian to Caracalla.

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INTRODUCTION

Few rivalries in the ancient world match that of the Romans and Parthians in scope and duration. For almost three centuries their two empires vied for military and economic control over the Middle East. But however victorious one side may have been on the battlefield, neither was able to conquer the other. Cultural exchanges in peacetime between these two separate worlds containing all mankind are often missed by general modern historical narratives. That is in part a knock-on-effect from the nature of the narratives of the classical historians themselves which tend to idealise and emphasise Rome's military prowess but make only passing reference to the peaceful relations between Romans and their eastern neighbours. This paper is designed to make a contribution to this neglected field. It will emerge upon reading it that gaps in current scholarship can be filled by careful evaluation of the ancient literary sources, as well as numismatic and archaeological findings. Of course, comprehensive historical works on Parthia were produced in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, most notably by Rawlinson,[1] Colledge[2] and Debevoise[3] and these are also given due care here. But given that today the study of Parthian history is still a growing discipline such works need to be considered alongside new finds in the fields of numismatics, archaeology, and epigraphy, as well as reappraisals of the ancient literary evidence, which add greatly to our understanding beyond these monographs.

This paper highlights peacetime interaction between Rome and Parthia, as well as the impact of war, upon peoples in the Roman and Parthian empires which have become better understood with the increase in discoveries made by archaeologists around the Middle East. Special focus is given to inscriptions made between Hadrian's and

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[1] Rawlinson, G., (1893) *Parthia*. T. Fisher Unwin. London.

[2] Colledge, M. A. R., (1967) *The Parthians*. Frederick A. Praeger Publishers. New York.

[3] Debevoise, N., (1938) *The Political History of Parthia*. University of Chicago Press. Chicago.

Septimius Severus' principates found at ancient Palmyra, the large Syrian trading-city of the Romans, which record the commercial exploits of Palmyrenes. In addition, sculptures and iconography found at Palmyra and also at Dura-Europos, a city on the Euphrates held in turn by Parthia and then Rome, which reflect the social and cultural interaction among peoples living on the frontier are also analysed. Furthermore, the study of coins found throughout the Near East highlights the extent of political influence along this frontier, and is still critical to understanding Parthian history. Finally, the archaeology of cities themselves, and other habitated areas such as forts and fortresses provide us with a picture of people movement, society, and military activity during the period which are carefully considered throughout this paper. As a result, in addition to the literary evidence Romans and other ancient writers have left for us we can soundly appreciate what conditions were like within, and between, these two ancient empires during both war and peace.

This paper examines what social conditions were like as they existed and developed between inhabitants of the Roman and Parthian Empires with special focus on the immediate and long-term effects wars had on inter-state trade. Trade is a necessity of society and is thus an important indicator of general feeling between the two empires' societies at all levels. Such research will prove vital in order to improve common understanding of the social conditions between Rome and Parthia as they existed from the reigns of the Flavians to Caracalla. Thus, this thesis endorses an understanding of not just political, but also social, history. As Fergus Millar aptly put it, the history of the Near East is inseparably interwoven together with the military and social aspects of everyday life.[4] It is clear, therefore, that the subject of this thesis is of great value for the investigation into the socio-political conditions of peace and war and how they, in turn, influenced the general social and economic landscape that existed between the Roman and Parthian Empires.

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[4] Millar, F., (1993) *The Roman Near East: 31BC-AD337*. Harvard University Press. London. p127.

To date, there have been a number of scholarly papers written which deal with specific topics covered by this paper, such as the policies of particular Parthian kings or Roman emperors, as well as the archaeology of certain times and places. The most important of these I survey below. As a result, what this paper adds to current scholarship is that in it I have synthesized the various findings within scholarship, and brought them together so to facilitate a greater understanding of the broader picture.

This dissertation is built upon several definitive books, published since those of Rawlinson, Colledge and Debevoise, such as A. H. M. Jones' *The Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces*, published in 1971. Through collaboration with other historians, Jones brought numismatic findings from Mesopotamia, Armenia and Syria, to bear on the issue of Roman and Parthian influence over those regions.[5] Numismatic study is essential to understand this topic and is crucial to any examination of Parthian history. In fact, Parthian coins are sometimes referred to as the annals of Parthian history. As a result, the utilization of coinage is taken up in this paper as well. This thesis also draws on Benjamin Isaac's (1990) *The Limits of Empire*, a book which challenged the general misconception of its day that the Roman Empire was static and had no fluctuations in imperial policy from one emperor to the next. Isaac drew upon archaeological as well as historical evidence and his findings to this end are thus well supported. In order to form the strongest arguments, I too have drawn upon Isaac's example. Whilst Roth has noted that Isaac's discussion does not take into account that Roman imperial policy was at times handed down from emperor to emperor,[6] his thematic argument that Roman foreign policy took on various forms under each emperor is nonetheless borne out by the sheer weight of the ancient evidence as presented in this paper.

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[5] See Gray, E., (1974) 'Review: The Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces by A. H. M. Jones', in *The Classical Review*, New Series, Vol 24, No 2, (November) pp271-273.

[6] Roth, J., (1996) 'Review: The Limits of Empire: The Roman Army in the East by Benjamin Isaac', in *The Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol 116, No 3 (July-September) p572.

In addition, Fergus Millar's (1993) book, *The Roman Near East 31BC-AD337*, broke new ground by synthesizing all of the archaeological, epigraphic and iconographic material at hand; and it has been my aim to do likewise throughout this thesis; however his rather generic portrayal of essentially reactive emperors in his earlier work, *The Emperor in the Roman World* is done away with in favour of a view that consists of certain reactive emperors and other princeps more confident militarily and willing to plan for future wars.[7] Aerial photographs taken of Roman military camps along its eastern frontiers compiled by Kennedy and Riley in (1990) *Rome's Desert Frontier from the Air* also adds crucial data to our knowledge in cases where there may be little other ancient literary evidence at hand to go by, and so is fundamental to all serious histories investigating Roman and Parthian contact like this one.[8] Maurice Sartre's (2001) *D'Alexandre a Zenobie*, which was translated into English in 2005 under the title *The Middle East Under Rome*, is a detailed history of the Roman presence in the Near East, and since it draws upon French scholarly works often passed over by English speaking historians, it offers a window into this thesis' topic that differs in emphasis from other English-prone works. Given that French scholarship is widely acknowledged as being just as important as that of the English language, it is therefore an essential source for any investigation into the Roman province of Syria.[9] Like Millar's *The Roman Near East*, Sartre's monograph serves as an outstanding example of the value that can be accrued by careful research into all of the evidence at hand, be it literary or archaeological, that has a bearing upon Roman and Parthian cultural exchanges – an example I have drawn upon in my own research for this dissertation. Also, like Millar, Sartre demonstrates that

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[7] See, Millar, F., (1977) *The Emperor in the Roman World*. Cornell University Press. Ithaca.

[8] Whitby, M., (1995) 'Review: The Roman Near East 31BC-AD337', in *The Classical Review*, New Series, Vol 45 No 1, pp104-106.

[9] Snyder, G., (2006) 'Review: The Middle East Under Rome by Maurice Sartre', in *The Journal of Religion*, Vol 86, No 3 (July) pp480-481. Keenan, J., (2008) 'Review: The Middle East Under Rome by Maurice Sartre', in *The journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Vol 67, No 2 (April) pp151-152.

Romano-Parthian relations were never static or firmly established; rather, as can be seen in the period this thesis covers, such relations were in a constant state of flux from one Roman emperor and one Parthian king to the next. This flux had an inevitable effect upon the protection of caravans along the Euphrates trade artery, a fact that Peter Edwell has found and one that is followed by this thesis.[10] Finally, Rose Mary Sheldon's (2010) *Rome's Wars in Parthia* is a detailed, if somewhat nuanced, account of war between the two empires. Although it focuses mainly upon Roman intelligence gathering, its example of looking beyond common accounts of wars towards a historical context in which they are placed is one that I too have taken up. As a result, this thesis' aim is to also look beyond wars and capture something of the social and historical settings in which they took place. Of course, political history is fundamental to the study of history, but it is not a perfect reflection on the whole of society by any means, and therefore to appreciate the ancient world in a more complete manner we must look beyond warfare alone.

In order to comprehend the various elements of Roman and Parthian societies and how they interacted, this paper addresses the ancient historical narratives and the contexts they provide us with for the contemporary literary sources of the times. These and other primary sources including inscriptions, sculpture and coinage have been sourced not only from the Roman and Parthian Empires, but also from India and China, to shed more light on the subject at hand. The historical contexts of these findings will be discussed as will their importance to this thesis.

It will become clear to the reader that this dissertation dissents from Luttwak's 1976 hypothesis for a consistently defensive Roman 'Grand Strategy'[11] and Kagan's appeal in

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[10] Edwell, P., (2008) *Between Rome and Persia: The Middle Euphrates, Mesopotamia and Palmyra Under Roman Control.* Routledge. London. p202.

[11] On the Grand Strategy see Luttwak, (1976) *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire From the First Century AD to the Third.* Baltimore. John Hopkins University Press. pp110f.

2006 for a turn to a revised version of Luttwak's claims.[12] According to both Luttwak and Kagan, all Roman emperors aimed at containing Parthia in a consistent manner.[13] However, it will be shown in this paper that emperors differed in foreign policy and frontier strategies almost from one to the next: Vespasian and Titus launched no invasion against Parthia, and nor did Nerva, Hadrian, Antoninus Pius, or Commodus; but Domitian did plan one, and Trajan, Marcus Aurelius, Septimius Severus and Caracalla all launched their own invasions in various forms. That lack of a clear trend was already well established by Vespasian's reign: Augustus ordered Tiberius to not extend the boundaries of the empire – an order ignored in the first few years of his reign as Germanicus campaigned beyond the Rhine – Caligula flirted with the concept if not the reality of foreign invasions, while Claudius launched a conquest of Britain, and Nero laid out plans for a war with Parthia. Put simply, Luttwak's bid for a 'Grand Strategy' is untenable, and Kagan's argument that there was actually some kind of culturally dictated innate disposition among Rome's emperors to carry out a grand strategy as shown by legion positioning around the empire even though the emperors themselves never ever perceived that fact, will also be shown to be false. For one thing, legion movements and frontier militarization differed from one emperor to the next. As Gruen has put it such a 'Strategy' can only be detected with hindsight but is not based on the actual ancient evidence itself which always bares the erratic, fluctuating, and inconsistent behaviour of Roman emperors and Roman society in general[14]

The tendency among most modern authors is to inquire solely into single aspects of Roman and Parthian relations has grown from the beginnings of scholarship in Parthian studies. This trend began in when 1897 Rawlinson's *Parthia* included a final chapter on

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[12] For Kagan's revised version of the strategy see Kagan, K., (2006) 'Redefining Roman Grand Strategy', in *The Journal of Military History*, Vol 70, No 2, (April) pp333-362.

[13] Luttwak, (1976) pp110f. Kagan, K., (2006) p333-362.

[14] Gruen, E., (1978) 'Reviews: The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire from the First Century AD to the Third', in *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol 8, No 3, (Winter) p563.

the topics of Parthian art, religion and customs. It was a groundbreaking venture for little was known about Parthian society at the time. Debevoise followed this precedent and discussed in *A Political History of Parthia* various other specific social aspects of the Parthians, such as commerce and Literature. It was also taken up by Colledge in *The Parthians* who gave space to more chapters on Parthian society, culture and art. Since then Colledge has also published *Parthian Art*, Keall has written on the economic policy of Parthian king Vologases (Vespasian's contemporary), and Wenke has investigated Parthian policy towards their Elymean subjects. In addition, compilations by various authors, such as *The Age of the Parthians* (edited by Curtis, V., and Stewart, S.,) have focused on specific Parthian social issues such as their use of symbolism and imagery for the purpose of self-definition. Finally, the *Cambridge History of Iran* is also an indispensable source of information on Parthian history and culture, and stands as a thorough treatment of Parthian society in general as well. In that volume Bivar's narrative of Parthian history is a detailed one, although some of his arguments are now dated, as will be shown throughout this thesis. Also, Sellwood's description of Parthian coinage in the same volume serves as a worthy exposition of Parthian politics as revealed by numismatics. Of course, use of evidence such as coinage has its limitations, but in this case Sellwood's chapter is revealing as to how Parthian kings and contenders wanted to be seen throughout their empire – a notable lesson on the imperial intentions of Parthia's ruling dynasty, the Arsacids.

Indeed, all serious treatments on Parthia today describe facets of Parthian society in some form. It is the aim of this paper to those facets together through investigation of the ancient evidence. For the period covered by this thesis it is the writings of the ancient Romans themselves that take a position of authority because virtually nothing remains in writing by actual Parthians. Fortunately however, writings by Roman authors on Rome's ongoing contact with Parthia abound, and as a result we have a wealth of ancient material, albeit one-sided, to draw on when investigating Parthian wars and conditions of trade between the two empires.

It has been argued by Warwick Ball that Roman bias has distorted the realities of Parthian history, and that Rome probably mattered very little to the Parthians,[15] but this should not prompt us to discarding the Roman sources altogether on the following grounds. Firstly, Parthia's Sassanid successors aggressively suppressed Parthia's historical literature and as a result almost all of Parthia's story as told by the Parthians themselves is lost; thus we cannot cross-check Parthian sources with Roman ones. Secondly, conditions on the ground convey that Rome was indeed of prime importance to Parthia: the fame of the imperial example of the Achaemenidae inspired Parthian rulers to look seriously at conquest in Syria, Armenia and the Anatolian peninsula, although they were always defeated by Roman armies there upon invasion. Furthermore, Parthia's responses to Roman invasions under Trajan, Verus, Severus and Caracalla involved the evacuation of Mesopotamia of armies so that they could regroup across the Zagros Mountains and then counter-attack. Such tactics, and the logistics needed to undertake them, were huge undertakings and must have demanded most inhabitants of the Parthian Empire to contribute in some way. Therefore, Rome must have been constantly in the minds of Parthia's subjects.

Consequently, something of Parthian society, and Rome's relations with it, is saved for posterity and generations to come through careful handling of the ancient sources. In fact, these conditions make studying Roman and Parthian relations beneficial in several ways, for by investigating Roman history one invariably learns about Parthian society, and in turn, by searching out evidence for Parthian society one inevitably gains a far greater understanding of Roman history.

Through investigating Roman and other ancient sources – literary, archaeological, numismatic and otherwise, as well as current scholarship - it is my hope that a clearer view of Roman and Parthian relations during times of both war and peace will emerge. The period covered is an important one. Although rarely covered by modern historians it

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[15] Ball, W., (2000) *Rome in the East: The Transformation of an Empire*. Routledge. London. pp2, 12.

was one of momentous importance. It begins with the Flavians and the first-century context for Romano-Parthian trade through the discussion of the ancient evidence and modern scholarship. Then it turns to Trajan and Hadrian and identifies their influence upon the dramatic overhaul of the economic status quo that took place during their principates. It will then proceed to analyse the Antonine and Severan periods with regard to Romano-Parthian relations and trade, and conclude by bringing the findings made throughout the thesis together.

Julio-Claudian Background

Before a discussion of Romano-Parthian relations and trade from the Flavians onward can take place, it is necessary to look back to the Julio-Claudian dynasty, which serves partly in this microcosm for this thesis. It will be shown here that this microcosm, like the period covered throughout, that there were three main themes of relations between Rome and Parthia that would have a lasting legacy into the Flavian dynasty and beyond: viz the possibilities of war and peace in the minds of Rome's and Parthia's rulers; the place of Armenia as a location for the two empires to exert their imperial dominance against the other's interests; and the voices of the non-elite expressing desire for interstate trade. Thus, it will become apparent that Vespasian's principate was not a new beginning for Romano-Parthian relations but was a culmination of events that had already taken place. Those concerns and events are now briefly set out.

Animosity between Rome and Parthia had been fomenting for decades over which power should ultimately control Armenia, since not only was it a constant matter of dispute, it was also the staging point for Roman generals, like Crassus and Antony, for invading Parthian territory. Such was its importance that Corbulo fought Parthia for years to control it. He was not the only one to do so. Tiberius had also fought the Parthian king Artabanus III for it and so did Trajan, who as this paper will discuss, deliberately used Armenia as a staging point for his war with Parthia. Although Marcus Aurelius did not utilize Armenia as a staging point for invasion, the matter of its control was reason enough to declare war on Parthia. (See pages 82f.) Fortunately for Parthia during

Tiberius' reign however, Tiberius chose to avert war against Parthia and dispatch Germanicus to settle affairs in Armenia and the eastern provinces diplomatically. When Germanicus arrived on the scene he found the Armenians were eager for Zeno, a Pontic prince who was friendly to Rome, to rule them. Consequently, Germanicus crowned him and the years of calm following Germanicus' death in 19AD are testament to Zeno's capacity to rule and Germanicus' foresight.

However, Artabanus persisted with his claims on Armenia. In 35AD, after the death of the Armenian king Artaxias III, he promptly installed his son, Arsaces, on the Armenian throne, and made known that his prime aim was to reconquer all of the former Archaemenid and Macedonian lands west of the Euphrates. According to Tacitus, Artabanus thought Tiberius to be old and unwarlike and was convinced that he could easily prove victorious over the Romans if war came.[16]

In response, Tacitus states that Tiberius launched a series of coups with the help of L. Vitellius. First, he nominated Phraates and Tiridates, both members of the Parthian ruling Arsacid dynasty, as rival claimants to the Parthian throne itself. Next, in 35AD, he appointed Vitellius as a new governor of Syria, and persuaded Iberian and Sarmatian allies to eject Arsaces from the Armenian throne. Promptly doing so, they next turned their military aggression against Parthia.[17] Artabanus had no choice but to march an army north into Armenia against the enemy. Vitellius then marched to the Euphrates River. Forced to fight on two fronts simultaneously if he chose war with Rome, Artabanus had no option but to retreat. Armenia was lost and Artabanus made no further attempt to press his authority over it. His dreams of reconquering the west were dashed by a Roman pincer movement.[18]

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[16] Tacitus, *Annals*, 6. 31.

[17] Tacitus, *Annals*, 6. 31f., Cassius Dio, 58. 26.

[18] Still one of the most thorough treatments on Tiberius's handling of Parthian issues is in Debevoise, N., (1938) pp158ff. For a more recent treatment on Tiberius' foreign policy see Levick, B., (1976) *Tiberius the Politician*. Thames and Hudson. pp125-147.

This strategy was characteristic of Tiberius. By implementing it thus he repeatedly succeeded in his goals where those before him like Crassus and Antony had failed dismally. They had tried to secure the cooperation of Armenia while they launched their campaigns from Syria. But on both occasions when Armenia changed tact and abandoned the Roman cause Crassus' and Antony's armies were left abandoned in hostile territory. Tiberius, however, was able to secure Armenia's allegiance, and the ruse of using foreign tribes for Roman purposes was one that would be repeated by Trajan's father and Hadrian in due course. In 20BC Tiberius had marched into Armenia while Augustus remained with another army at the ready in Syria thus placing Parthia in the same precarious position. At that time it produced the favourable result in the return of the Roman standards and prisoners captured by the Parthians from Crassus' and other Roman commanders' armies.[19] The appeal of such a device was to remain with the Romans.[20] By securing an alliance with the Iberians in Armenia, and with the action of Vitellius in Syria, this two-pronged attack proved a success once again.

Towards the end of Nero's reign the emperor had already begun preparations for a full-scale war against Parthia and the Alani. According to Dio, however, Nero was eventually dissuaded from the enterprise, because of the large costs and effort involved in such a large military venture.[21] But such reasoning for Nero's calling off the invasion appears to be Dio's own rather than Nero's. Dio was foisting his own judgment of Severus' eastern policy, which he believed in like terms to have been a source of constant

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[19] Cassius Dio, 54. 8-9.

[20] The tactic had an older origin than Tiberius. Marc Antony had attacked Parthia after first marching through Armenia, and Julius Caesar had made plans to attack Parthia via Armenia before he was assassinated. In fact its seeds can be seen in Crassus' own invasion. He had secured an alliance with Armenia before his attack east of the Euphrates, and although it proved a dismal failure, Armenia remained the gateway into Parthia for Roman armies up to Trajan's Parthian war.

[21] Cassius Dio, 62. 8. 1-2.

wars and great expense,[22] onto Nero. This grievance against Severus was a common one among his elite peers,[23] and was shared by Dio. The reasons are twofold. Firstly, there was Severus' handling of the Senate. From the outset of his reign Severus openly praised the cruelty of Marius, Sulla and Augustus in their dealings with senators, and that resonated throughout Severus' reign among a fearful and outraged Roman senate of which Dio was a second or third generation.[24] Secondly, Dio generally frowned upon imperial expansion, and consequently wrote accordingly without any desire to investigate Nero's actual motives on the issue.[25]

Tacitus, however, gives a different reason for Nero's calling the campaign off, stating that Nero had already given the order to detachments from Germany, Britain and the Balkans to march for the Caspian Gates but then he had to recall them to address Vindex's revolt in Gaul.[26] As for why Nero had decided to campaign in the East, telling evidence is given by Suetonius, who remarked that the emperor had a phalanx formed and trained for the coming invasion that he called 'The Phalanx of Alexander the Great'.[27] Behind Augustus' legacy loomed Alexander's achievements waiting to be

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[22] Cassius Dio, 75. 3. 3.

[23] On Dio's sources and his peers' influence upon his narrative, see Moscovich, M., (2004) 'Cassius Dio's Palace Sources for the Reign of Septimius Severus', in *Historia: Zeitschrift fur Alto Geschichte*, Vol 53, No 3, pp356-368.

[24] Cassius Dio, 75. 21., 76. 8. 1. Cooley, A., (2007) 'Septimius Severus: The Augustan Emperor', in Swain, S., Harrison, S., Elsner, J., (eds.) *Severan Culture*. Cambridge University Press. pp385, 389. On Dio's life and career see Millar, F., (1964) *A Study of Cassius Dio*. Oxford. pp8f.

[25] Sidebottom, H., (2007) 'Severan Historiography: Evidence, Patterns and Arguments', in Swain, S., Harrison, S., Elsner, J., (eds.) p76.

[26] Tacitus, *Histories*, 1. 6.

[27] Suetonius, *Nero*, 19.

replicated. Such allure enticed Nero. It would entice other Romans as well that followed Nero.[28]

In the end, the Parthian king, Vologases requested peace, saying that Tiridates, the Parthian nominee for the Armenian throne and Vologases' own brother, would submit to Rome and even travel there to receive his crown from the emperor were it not for his religious observances.[29] Nero ordered a halt to hostilities and proclaimed he would indeed give Armenia to Tiridates after all, provided Tiridates made the journey to Rome regardless, upon which he would be coronated by Nero in Rome.[30]

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[28] On Alexander's influence on Roman emperors see Sartre, M., (2005) *The Middle East Under Rome*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press. London. An abridged edition of Sartre, M., (2001) *D'Alexandre a Zenobie*. Librairie Artheme Fayard. p65, and especially Ball, W., (2000) pp8ff. For analysis of Nero's eastern policy see Hammond, M., (1934) 'Corbulo and Nero's Eastern Policy', in *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, Vol 45, pp81-104., Syme, R., (1970) 'Domitius Corbulo', in *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol 60, pp27-39., and Gillmartin, K., (1973) 'Corbulo's Campaigns in the East: An Analysis of Tacitus' Account', in *Historia: Zeitschrift fur Alte Geschichte*, Vol 22, No 2, (4th Quarter) pp583-626. For analysis of Nero's foreign policy in general see Griffin, M., (1984) *Nero: The End of a Dynasty*. B. T. Batsford Ltd. London. pp47-48, 56-7, 123-130, 169-170, 186-187, 197-200, 203-206, 211.

[29] On Tiridates as a magus, see Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 30. 16-17.

[30] Tacitus, *Annals*, 24ff.

Flavian Eastern Policy

This section will argue that Romano-Parthian relations were often in a state of flux. They were simply never as consistent as Luttwak and Kagan have accepted. Levick's *Vespasian*, Isaac's *Limits of Empire*, and Whittaker's article 'Frontiers' in *Cambridge Ancient History* all display that a thorough knowledge of the archaeological evidence consistently disproves Luttwak's case at every turn. They will be discussed in this section. In this paper both sides will be discussed, but it is the argument against Luttwak's argument which prevails. It will be shown that given the sheer weight of ancient evidence, particularly certain archaeological discoveries, ignored by Luttwak, no other conclusion is at this stage possible. Of course, new discoveries may alter that, but they would need to be evaluated in light of those already found.

Vespasian

In AD70, Vespasian emerged sole princeps of the Roman Empire. Rawlinson in 1893 argued that Vespasian and Vologases had agreed on a pact of non-aggression that lasted for the full term of Vespasian's rule.[31] This view has some merit in light of Josephus' statement that immediately before the Jewish War, Agrippa had publicly proclaimed in Jerusalem that Vologases was "anxious to preserve his armistice with the Romans".[32] It also has some basis considering that Vologases offered to support Vespasian's bid for the principate with forty thousand archers should the need arise.[33] This view thus has had

[31] Rawlinson, G., (1893) *Parthia*. T. Fisher Unwin. London. pp292-296.

[32] Josephus, *The Jewish War*, 2. 377-396.

[33] Suetonius, *Vespasian*, 6.

remarkable longevity, and Syme,[34] Luttwak[35] and Campbell[36] have all accepted that there must have indeed been at least some understanding of mutual cooperation existing between Rome and Parthia.

However, other historians have become increasingly unsatisfied with Rawlinson's argument,[37] and their observations are considered well founded here in light of the ancient evidence, including that of archaeology which has only come to light in the twentieth century. The most important source for their case is Pliny the Younger's *Panegyricus* which explicitly states that M. Ulpius Traianus, father of the future emperor Trajan, won *ornamenta triumphalia* during his governorship of Syria between 73/74-76/77 for a military victory over the Parthians.[38] Although Pliny's *Panegyricus* was presented to the Roman Senate upon Trajan's accession, it is nonetheless reliable in its basic facts. Archaeological evidence also makes Rawlinson's claims untenable. A lengthy Greek inscription left by a Roman soldier during Vespasian's principate has been discovered at Harmozica, 14km from Tbilisi – the ancient capital of Iberia, suggests that Roman soldiers were deployed to the area on imperial order for action there. According to the inscription itself, a detachment of Roman soldiers had been deployed there by Vespasian, Titus and Domitian in order to ostensibly repair a fort in Iberia on behalf of its

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[34] Syme, R., (1958) *Tacitus*. Oxford. London. p30. Syme argued for the possibility of a desire by Vologases I to wish Vespasian to act "for the common interests of the two empires".

[35] Such is the theme of Luttwak, E., (1976) *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire From the First Century AD to the Third*. John Hopkins University Press. Baltimore.

[36] Campbell, B., (1993) 'War and Diplomacy: Rome and Parthia, 31BC-AD235', in Rich, J., and Shipley, G., (eds.) *War and Society in the Roman World*. Routledge. London. pp233-234.

[37] Goldsworthy, A., (2003) *In the Name of Rome: The Men Who Won the Roman Empire*. Phoenix. London. p362.

[38] Pliny the Younger, *Panegyricus*, 9, 14, 16.

king Mithridates, a "*philokaisari* and *philorhomai*".[39] In light of this discovery, Isaac was the first to argue that there was in fact no 'Grand Strategy' on the Romans' part simply to defend the empire's boundaries in the East. According to Isaac, Romans were always opportunistic, and conquered wherever they could, and with that, their motive for campaigning was rarely to reach a defensible boundary.[40] As a result, the traditional consensus of a defensive policy, Isaac concluded, should be discarded.

Others have since agreed with Isaac, including Whittaker who observed that the old view that the Flavians simply defended their frontiers is "a myth".[41] Whittaker points out that in addition to Isaac's conclusion much can be said for Vespasian's transformation of Cappadocia into a military province. There, Whittaker argues, the two legionary bases established along its Euphrates frontier at Satala and Melitene, holding the *XVI Flavia Firma* and the *XII Fulminata* respectively,[42] and another two military bases at Samosata and Zeugma along the Syria-Commagene Euphrates frontier, highlight their military importance. Certainly, militarization of such regions, by means of the deployment of legions there, was never intended to form a purely defensible military front, but rather to provide bases for invasion further east;[43] but it should always be remembered that Roman roads served a number of other purposes including the facilitation of communications and human movement generally.[44] Of course, it is true that Trajan made full use of these military bases in Cappadocia and Commagene, and in particular that at Satala, during his

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[39] *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum (SEG)* 20. 112. Crum, M., and Woodhead, A., (1961) *Select Documents of the Principates of the Flavian Emperors*. Cambridge University Press. p72. Number 237.

[40] Isaac, B., (1990) *The Limits of Empire. The Roman Army in the East*. Clarendon Press. Oxford. pp67, 416.

[41] Whittaker, C., (2000) 'Frontiers', in *The Cambridge Ancient History*, Vol 11, p309.

[42] Jones, B., (1992) *The Emperor Domitian*. Routledge. London. pp155, 231 note 54.

[43] Whittaker, C., (2000) p309.

[44] Southern, P., (2007) *The Roman Army: A Social and Institutional History*. Oxford University Press. p229.

own invasion of Armenia; and such facts belie their potential role as a launching pad for a Parthian war. But that said, the stationing of troops in Cappadocia and Commagene-Syria in itself does not imply that its prime aim was war with Parthia; but rather the potential for war in the east against any threat that might emerge there, and to suit any imperial need should it arise.

In fact when in 1993 Woolf challenged historians on both sides of the debate to step outside it and reassess its structure and terms for the sake of objectivity on the issue[45] Levick argued for that same point. After extensive investigation Levick argued that the bolstering of troops in the Roman East served for both defensive and offensive purposes. The conversion of Cappadocia into a military province, for instance, is a case in point, and its purpose was to defend the empire around the Black Sea against the 'barbarians' from the north, like the Alani, as keeping the initiative against the 'barbarians' of Parthia or Armenia. Such was Suetonius' opinion too, as he wrote that: "He [Vespasian] garrisoned Cappadocia as a precaution against the frequent barbarian raids."[46]

Levick also argued that the study of troop movement and road building supports such dual defense-offense purposes of Vespasian. With the *IV Scythia* still stationed at Zeugma, and the *XII Fulminata* moved to Melitene in Cappadocia and the *XVI Flavia* and other legionary detachments to Satala from Syria, Vespasian was indeed decidedly shifting the military effort to the north for defence and attack.[47] Thus, while protecting Roman territories, the situating of military bases along the Euphrates allowed the Romans to maintain the initiative for action either to the north or east.[48]

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[45] Woolf, G., (1993) 'Roman Peace', in Rich, J., and Shipley, G., (eds.) *War and Society in the Roman World.* Routledge. London. pp180-181.

[46] Suetonius, *Vespasian*, 8.

[47] Levick, B., (1999) p166.

[48] Levick, B., (1999) pp167-169.

Troop movement under the Flavians was facilitated by the extensive road network built throughout Syria under Traianus' supervision throughout the mid 70s. Milestones from 75 marking the Palmyra-Sura road, from 72 marking an Apamaea-Raphanaea road, and from 75 indicating the existence of a Palmyra-Apamaea road intersecting with a Chalcis-Emesa road, attest to activity in roadbuilding in Syria under Traianus.[49] According to Syme these roadbuilding projects were closely monitored by Traianus acting as the "principal agent" of the emperor "from the Armenian mountains to the desert of Arabia."[50] This hypothesis was given basis when, in March 1973, a milestone was discovered near the Judaean town of Afula that was left by Traianus and which shows that he was a staunch and trusted supporter of Vespasian's. It reads:

"Imp(erator)/Caesar [Ve]spa/sianus
Aug(ustus) M(arco) [Ul]/pio Tr[ai]an[o]
Leg(ato)/ leg(ionis) X Fret(ensis)/XXXIV"[51]

As the inscription features none of the honours voted by the Roman Senate to Vespasian after he had secured power, this means that the milestone must have been erected by Traianus, who had served under Vespasian and Titus in the Jewish War,[52] beforehand. Therefore, he must have supported Vespasian's bid for the principate right from the outset.[53] As a reward for his support Traianus may have been given the consulship in 70, and a place in the senatorial patriciate in 73, alongside his *triumphalia ornamenta*.[54] As with the awarding of the *ornamenta*, Vespasian was keen to reward his loyal supporters

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[49] Sartre, M., (2007) p65.

[50] Syme, R., (1958) p31.

[51] Isaac, B., Roll, I., (1976) 'A Milestone of AD69 from Judaea: The Elder Trajan and Vespasian', in *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol 66, p15.

[52] Josephus, *Jewish War*, 3. 278f., 3, 448f., 4. 440f.

[53] Isaac, B., Roll, I., (1976) p18.

[54] Although the dating of the consulship is uncertain, Syme observed it is likely to have been in 70AD. See Syme, R., (1958) p30.

and Traianus was among the most loyal. Such rewards ensured the goodwill of Vespasian's generals, like Traianus', towards their emperor, and in effect made him someone Vespasian could trust to handle affairs in the East. Certainly, by electing Traianus to the patriciate, Vespasian was placing solid trust into Traianus' loyalty, and by giving him a powerful position in the East several years later Vespasian was again showing off that same trust.

However, just what the original purpose of that position remains a matter of some debate. In 1973 Bowersock argued that Traianus was sent to Syria in 73/74 to oversee the mass urbanization of the province. It was never to be a policy forced onto the region though. Rather, Bowersock argues, Vespasian was providing the initiative for the facilitation of better roads and buildings for the local entrepreneurs like those in Palmyra to use voluntarily and exploit for their vocations, livelihoods and wealth. It was this which was Vespasian's true 'Grand Strategy', Bowersock believed.[55] It is a compelling case. As Sartre has pointed out, Syria was one of the most lucrative centers of commerce in the whole Roman Empire,[56] and ensuring its position as such must have been of vital concern to Vespasian and Traianus. In fact, Syrian tax posts reaped a handsome 25 percent duty on all goods passing through whether bound for Ctesiphon to the east or the Syrian ports such as Tyre, Sidon, and Antioch to the west.[57] Such a high duty reflects the high demand of goods from the East.[58] It may also reflect Rome's desire for funds after the civil wars. Such demand and desire found ready supply in trade with lands to the east. The Euphrates River was a hub of maritime trade linking Mesopotamia with Armenia to the north, Syria and Anatolia to the west and the Persian Gulf to the south. Indeed, the river was never a natural barrier to trade or human traffic between east and west. Rather,

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[55] Bowersock, G., (1973) 'Syria Under Vespasian', in *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol 63, p140.

[56] Sarte, M., (2007) p267.

[57] Sartre, M., (2007) pp256-257. For ancient commentary on customs procedures along the Euphrates see Philostratus, *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, 1. 20.

[58] Jones, A. H. M., (1974) *The Roman Economy*. Basil Blackwell. Oxford. pp171-172.

it was a means of facilitating such trade and traffic along its banks and many wharfs. By linking Syria with the Euphrates Traianus was opening up this lucrative trade to Syrians and Anatolians.

However, just as it would be erroneous to presume that Vespasian's motives in the eastern provinces were entirely militaristic, so too it would be wrong to say they were purely economic. Other evidence shows that Vespasian also had another reason for his conversion of Cappadocia and Commagene into a military zone: to prepare them for future campaigns in the East. In the Roman Empire roadworks were an important means of carrying out troop movements – a reality Vespasian was well aware of. In 66 Cestius Gallus used the Antioch to Ptolemais road built eleven years earlier to move troops against Judaea, and Vespasian himself used it for the same purpose one year later.[59] Critically, as well as his own Via Traiana linking Beneventum with Brundisium,[60] Trajan used the roads built under Vespasian for his invasion into Armenia. Of course, Trajan simply had to make best use of the conditions presented to him, but those conditions, established under Vespasian, had certainly been intended to anticipate military campaigns like Trajan's own. That Vespasian's road network was used to transport Trajan's massive army with success alone indicates that it was no ordinary road network.

Vologases was also expanding Parthian imperialist claims in the west and consolidating his position against Rome's own interests. He may have been preparing for a future escalation like Vespasian: he had already successfully installed his brother Tiridates on the Armenian throne, despite Corbulo's best efforts to stop him,[61] and was consolidating Parthia's position throughout other areas of his empire too. By 73 Parthian armies had penetrated west of the southern region of the Euphrates River, and recovered Babylonia and Spasinou Charax for Parthia lost in the early first century. The important

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[59] On Roman armies' use of roads in the eastern provinces, see Isaac, B., (1990) p110.

[60] Birley, A., (1997) *Hadrian: The Restless Emperor*. Routledge. London. p65.

[61] On Corbulo's Parthian and Armenian wars see Tacitus, *Annals*, 12. 43f., 13. 4f., 14. 22f., 15. 1f.

new city of Vologasias near Seleucia and Ctesiphon was built. At the outset of his reign, Vologases' bid for the throne was contested by his son Vardanes II. Consequently, Vologases appealed to his empire's Iranian heartland[62] for support: as Sellwood demonstrated, Vologases' coinage at this point began blending Aramaic as well as Greek legend conventions and adopted traditional Parthian-Persian symbol and titles.[63] It is no accident that in the last years of Vologases' life, the usurper Pacorus II relied upon the Greek issues of Seleucia.[64] The use of Iranian symbolism, the establishment of Vologasias, and the construction of other public works across Mesopotamia including the rebuilding of Ziggurats at Enlil and Nippur show, as Keall finds, a concerted strategy on the Parthian king's part to re-establish his and Parthia's claim over the empire and its commerce.[65] But Vologases' resources, like Vespasian's, were limited after civil war: hence, the importance Parthia placed in the 'False Neros'[66] as an option to undermine the Flavian dynasty hold on the principate, as opposed to more costly military intervention. Thus, both Romans and Parthians were stimulating and securing the trade networks in their common frontiers and were extending their imperialist aspirations with manpower, however after civil wars neither side could afford full-scale warfare.

Nonetheless, full-scale warfare was nearly a reality when in 73/74 reports were made by Titus' uncle, Caesennius Paetus, who was then governor of Syria, that Antiochus the

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[62] On the resurgence of Iranian culture during the Parthian period, see Yarshater, E., (2000) 'Introduction', in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol 3 (1) xvii-lxxv.

[63] Sellwood, D., (1967) 'A Die-Engraver Sequence for Later Parthian Drachms', in *The Numismatic Chronicle*, pp18-19, and plate 1, type 59 C (early) and 59 E (late). Sellwood, D., (1983) 'Parthian Coins', in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol 3 (1) p295.

[64] Bivar, A., (1983) 'The Political History of Iran Under the Arsacids', in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol 3 (1) p86.

[65] Keall, E., (1975) 'Parthian Nippur and Vologases' Southern Strategy: A Hypothesis', in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol 95, No 4, (October-December) pp620-626.

[66] On the 'False Neros', see Levick, B., (1999) *Vespasian*. Routledge. London. p145.

king of Commagene planned to defect to the Parthians.[67] Such a move would have resulted in a serious breach of trust between Rome and Parthia. Although Josephus did not place his trust in Paetus' report, stating that it was unclear to him and many other whether or not Paetus' report was made "in good faith or to spite Antiochus", Josephus did state the fact nonetheless, that upon Paetus' appearance in Commagene, Antiochus' sons,

> "...rode without interference to the Parthian court, where Vologases, so far from despising them as runaways, received them, as if they still enjoyed their old prosperity, with all honour."[68]

Such a welcome had serious implications, especially if Antiochus and his sons had had secret dealings of the kind with Vologases that Paetus alleged. If they existed as Paetus claimed, such dealings showed a serious breach of trust between Rome and Commagene, and indeed Parthia too. It is noteworthy that Caracalla was later to use the Parthian retainment of certain persons despite his wishes to recover them as a pretext for war.[69]

Antiochus himself was captured by Paetus and sent in fetters to the emperor whereupon Vespasian promptly had the king unchained and kept in luxurious confinement in Sparta. The use of hostages was an important part of Roman diplomacy. Primarily they served two purposes. The first was to keep their respective nations to supporting Rome's will - for defying it could mean the death of the hostage. As a result, the Romans often sought for the most noble of hostages to maintain the goodwill of as many of the hostages' subjects as possible. Thus, Augustus could boast of the Parthian king Phraates' entrusting his sons to him as beneficial to the Roman people,[70] and Velleius Paterculus could later see the giving over of the Parthian king's sons to

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[67] Josephus, *The Jewish War*, 6. 220ff.

[68] Josephus, *The Jewish War*, 8. 230f.

[69] Cassius Dio, 78. 19. 1.

[70] *Res Gestae Divi Augusti*, 32.

Germanicus as indicative of the greatness of Tiberius and Roman power.[71] The second purpose of hostage-taking was that while the hostages were within Rome or the confines of the Roman Empire, they could be deliberately Romanized so that when they eventually returned to their country of origin they could maintain ties there with Rome.[72] However, that was never a solid guarantee that unfolding events were always as Rome desired. Parthian kings like Phraates that sent their children to Rome for an education often did so simply to maintain their own position by removing them from power in the Parthian court. Furthermore, once hostages returned to their own countries they were often rejected by their countrymen who saw them as foreigners and outsiders.[73] Therefore, with both Rome and Parthia possessing hostages from Commagene, the stage was set for a complete breakdown in relations.

But war was averted. An inscription found at Baalbek in Syria implies that a covert operation was put into action by the Romans which secured the capture or handover of Antiochus' sons. It reads:

> "To Gaius Velius Rufus son of Salvius... He was sent into Parthia and brought back to the Emperor Vespasian Epiphanes and Callinias, the sons of king Antiochus [of Commagene], together with a large number of tribute-paying persons."[74]

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[71] Velleius Paterculus, 94. 4.

[72] On hostages in general see Sidebottom, H., (2007) 'International Relations', in Sabin, P., Wees, H., and Whitby, M., (eds.) *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Warfare*, Vol 2, Rome From the Late Republic to the Late Empire, pp22-24.

[73] For examples see Tacitus, *Annals*, 2. 4, 2. 56, 11. 16, 12. 14. On hostages in general see Sidebottom, H., (2007) pp22-24.

[74] Dessau no 9,200, in Lewis, N., and Reinhold, M., (1990) *Roman Civilization: Selected Readings. The Empire*. Vol 2. Columbia University Press. p49.

As a result, the Parthian threat to Vespasian's arrangements in Cappadocia-Commagene was neutralised and the emperor, with able genius, had succeeded in maintaining his aim to militarise it for future military purposes without reverting to a costly and unaffordable war.

Admittedly, Rawlinson followed Josephus' doubts about Paetus' report to the emperor and discredited it completely, calling it the machinations of an unsuccessful general who solely desired a war as a field for his energies.[75] But many disagree with Rawlinson's idealized view. Even Debevoise, who was so often in agreement with Rawlinson, was conspicuously silent on the issue.[76] In any case we know from Pliny the Younger that Traianus won *ornamenta triumphalia* during his governorship for a victory over the Parthians soon after he replaced Paetus as governor of Syria. Such a victory was no doubt the result of a breakdown in relations stretching further back than what Rawlinson recognized. Perhaps Traianus' recourse to fighting was the result of events unfolding during his predecessor's governorship.

Of course, it is important that we know exactly what we are dealing with in regard to Traianus' *ornamenta triumphalia.* We must take into consideration the fact that such decorations were sometimes given out during this period for reasons other than military ones. But the awarding of *triumphalia ornamenta*, for reasons other than military, was extremely rare. Given Pliny's testimony it is logical to draw the conclusion that it was won in concert with the Alani invasion of c.AD73. According to Josephus the Alani, in concert with the Hyrcani, poured into Armenia and then Media, and devastated not just the countryside but also captured a huge amount of prisoners and booty.[77] The existence of Roman soldiers at Harmozica at the same time cannot be coincidence. Although Levick is right to point out that the inscription there ostensibly claims that its Roman

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[75] Rawlinson, G., (1893) pp292-293.

[76] Debevoise, N., (1938) pp198-199.

[77] Josephus, *The Jewish War*, 8. 250ff.

writers were there to help repair a building for Mithridates, King of Iberia,[78] Debevoise was also right to point out their timing with the Alani incursions, and that the Romans must have been deployed there on Traianus' orders to orchestrate with them,[79] and it was that which earnt Traianus his *ornamenta*.

However, Vespasian was not intent on full-scale Roman mobilization. Suetonius is clear that upon winning the throne Vespasian found that the empire was in arrears by 40 billion sesterces.[80] Even though that figure has been amended by modern historians to 4 billion sesterces, it was still a huge debt to incur,[81] and indicates that by Traianus' governorship Rome's treasury would have only just been out of debt. A full-scale war was thus unaffordable - especially one against Parthia. It had recovered sooner than Rome had after its own civil war. Militarily speaking it was active once again, and was able to reassert itself over its former territories along its empire's fringes. As Goldsworthy has pointed out, any war against Parthia was an extremely expensive venture, requiring huge numbers of troops to be maintained for fighting, sieges, and garrison duty and the bleak terrain of the Parthian Empire meant that any potential for foraging for their sustenance was limited.[82] Now was not the time for such a war. In short, after the wastefulness of Nero's principate and the civil wars of 69 Vespasian could not have waged war with Parthia. However, he could afford the costless victories of the Alani, and he was able to make valuable political capital of Traianus' role in them, which was sorely needed to reaffirm the new Flavian dynasty's legitimacy to rule.

Vespasian could also afford to play Parthia's other neighbours off against it. Tiberius had used the Iberians for that purpose decades earlier, and Hadrian was later to do precisely the same thing by forming ties of friendship with the Alani, Hyrcanians, and

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[78] *SEG* 20. 112. Levick, B., (1999) p169.

[79] Debevoise, N., (1938) pp201-202.

[80] Suetonius, *Vespasian*, 16.

[81] Levick, B., (1999) p95.

[82] Goldsworthy, A., (2007) *Roman Warfare*. Phoenix. London. p143.

other neighbours of Parthia to contain it.[83] Vespasian did likewise and thus ensured that once Rome was again in a suitable monetary position it would have in place the right circumstances to embark on a full-scale war against Parthia. He was in fact taking all the required steps to ensure a future military victory against Parthia should a war take place, whilst in the meantime ensuring Parthia was susceptible so that a future general could achieve that victory. While maintaining three whole legions and their auxiliary forces at the ready in Syria, Vespasian was also keeping up a second front for use against Parthia if required, which also served as a diversion from his troop movements in Cappadocia-Commagene. It was a tactic Tiberius had used on more than one occasion with great success and he may have been Vespasian's inspiration. Indeed, this conclusion is shared by Levick, who advertises Vespasian's astute and economical strategies as the equal of Augustus' and Tiberius', enabling him and his successors to select offensive or defensive measures according to their strength and opportunities.[84]

As for Dio's statement that Vespasian once remarked that he never desired to interfere in other's affairs, if true, it could never has been intended as a true reflection of the complexities of the emperor's foreign policy. As shown by his cooperation with the Alani and Traianus' honours, Vespasian was keen to involve himself in foreign affairs when it suited his purposes. In any event, the importance Dio placed in the remark is not a true reflection on Vespasian's own. Dio was simply voicing his own opinion in regard to what made Septimius Severus an unsuccessful princeps by contrasting him with Vespasian. Dio expressed his deep dissatisfaction with Severus in completely opposite terms to Vespasian, and Severus was condemned by Dio, who generally opposed imperialist expansionism, precisely for interfering in affairs in the east, stating:

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[83] 'Hadrian', *Historia Augusta*, 17, 21.

[84] Levick, B., (1999) p169.

"...now that we have reached out to peoples who are neighbours of the Medes and Parthians rather than of ourselves, we are always, one might say, fighting the battles of those peoples."[85]

Vespasian had actually reversed Roman policy towards both the Alani and Parthians: whereas Nero had once made preparations for war against the Alani, Vespasian now sought out their alliance. The princeps' policy towards Parthia, however, was just the opposite. Whereas once he and Parthia had considered acting together for his claim to the principate, he now used the Alani for war against Vologases. However, Vespasian had little choice on that matter: by offering to intervene militarily in the civil wars of 69, and in the crowning of Titus,[86] Parthia had shown itself as ready and willing to intervene in Roman issues. As a result, Vespasian secured its alliance with the Alani, and with the help of their invading armies, showed that it was he who intended to intervene in Parthia.

Titus

However, the motives of Vespasian and his son Titus agendas for the east were not entirely militaristic and economical: symbolism had its part to play as well. Titus' procession after the Jewish War indicates the fact that for Rome and Parthia, image was of fundamental importance both to reassure their subjects and inspire confidence, as well as to establish the legitimacy of their rulers. Josephus stated that along the journey north from Jerusalem Titus took leave from pressing business at Antioch and proceeded to Zeugma on the Euphrates where he was ceremonially crowned by envoys of Vologases. He wrote:

"For Titus did not stay at Antioch but marched on immediately to Zeugma on the Euphrates. There he was met by envoys from the Parthian king, Vologases, who

[85] Cassius Dio, 75. 3. 3.

[86] Josephus, *The Jewish War*, 7. 93ff.

bestowed on him a golden crown in honour of his victory over the Jews. Accepting this he feasted the king's emissaries, then returned to Antioch."[87]

The importance that Titus attached to this display as opposed to all other immediate business in Antioch demonstrates that the crowning was important to him and was thoroughly stage-managed. The clear message to the public was Titus and Vologases in this ceremony were acting together to reverse the negative impression of Roman custom created in the public mind in the East with Tiridates' infamous procession and crowning by Nero. Tiridates, who had been installed on the Armenian throne by his brother Vologases, the king of Parthia, had set out for Rome after agreeing to receive his crown from Nero and was welcomed into the city with fanfare and celebration for his coronation. By all accounts it was an important social event. Tacitus comments that Tiridates set out:

"...to make a world-wide exhibition of himself; he was little short of a prisoner,"[88]

But nonetheless, as Dio states emphatically that Tiridates': "progress all the way from the Euphrates was like a triumphal procession."[89]

It was a bold exhibition of mockery for Roman custom and must have belittled Rome in the eyes of many who witnessed it. Conspicuously, only several years later Titus led his procession from Jerusalem to Rome following the Jewish war.[90] Given that the triumph was of fundamental importance to Roman identity,[91] it was a deliberate act to restore

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[87] Josephus, *The Jewish War*, 7. 93ff.

[88] Tacitus, *Annals*, 15. 28ff.

[89] Cassius Dio, 63. 2.

[90] Josephus, *The Jewish War*, 7. 93ff.

[91] For discussion on the Roman triumph, see Beard, M., (2007) *The Roman Triumph*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, London.

Roman military pride and image throughout the East. Levick argues that the Parthians were also intended to witness Titus' display of Roman victory to thus dissuade them from invading Roman territory which had appeared vulnerable during the Jewish War.[92]

But just as the crowning of Tiridates carried with it double-meaning, with success in the eyes of Rome on the one hand and mockery in the East on the other, so too did the crowning of Titus. With it there was undeniably Parthian recognition of Roman military power in the region,[93] but the crowning also suited Vologases' own imperialist purposes. While the crowning of Tiridates in Rome was a display of Nero's power to make kings, so too Titus' crowning made Parthia appear to have power to establish the Flavian dynasty, and it cost Vologases little. Of course, in the face of Titus' increasing involvement in Adiabene and the election of Titus' uncle Paetus to the governorship in Syria,[94] it was a shrewd move by Vologases, and by accepting his crowning gesture Titus had in effect reassured the Parthian king that peace would be maintained, at least for the time being.[95] The crowning restored, as did the strengthening of Roman forts along the Euphrates and the victories of Traianus, the military pride and public image of Rome among its subjects in the eastern provinces.

Domitian

Domitian had military ambitions and like Vespasian and Titus wished to equal them in the East.[96] Although Whittaker argues that the strengthening of Roman military bases along the Euphrates by Vespasian was so that an invasion of Mesopotamia could be left to Domitian himself,[97] in fact, Domitian's eastern policy differed little from his father's.[98]

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[92] Levick, B., (1999) pp155, 165.

[93] Jones, B., (1984) *The Emperor Titus*. Croom Helm. London. p56.

[94] Josephus, *The Jewish War*, 6. 356., 7. 39ff., 7. 59.

[95] On these matters see Jones, B., (1984) pp56-57.

[96] Jones, B., (1992) *The Emperor Domitian*. Routledge. London. p155f.

[97] Whittaker, C., (2000) p309.

Through alliances with Parthia's neighbours the Iberians, Hyrcanians and Albanians, together with roadbuilding and increased militarization throughout Cappadocia, Domitian was able to keep Parthian imperialist aspirations in check.[99] Southern has argued that this was the extent of Domitian's interest in the East, since the idea of an eastern campaign is based on Statius' poetry which is historically unreliable.[100] However archaeology has proven otherwise. An inscription left by a centurion during Domitian's reign on the Apsheronsky peninsula on the Caspian coast near Baku, indicates that Domitian maintained designs on Armenia and Parthia. It reads:

> "Imp(eratore) Domitiano Caesare Aug(usto) Germanic(o) L. Ilius Maximus (centurion) leg(ionis) XII Ful(minatae)".[101]

In fact, Domitian had for a long time entertained the idea of an Eastern campaign as an exciting prospect – during Vespasian's reign he had tried to secure an auxiliary force to help the Parthians against the Alani. Vespasian, Suetonius states, refused.[102]

Domitian sent his detachment ahead to the Caspian coast probably in order to gather sorely needed intelligence for a possible future campaign there. That was actually nothing new. Nero had done so before him, and as a result, Statius' claim that Domitian was planning a military campaign to India and the Far East, via the Araxes River which flows into the Caspian Sea, may contain some truth.[103]

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[98] Jones, B., (1992) pp155f.

[99] Jones, B., (1992) pp155-157.

[100] Southern, P., (1997) *Domitian: Tragic Tyrant.* Routledge. London. pp112, 153 note 7.

[101] Isaac, B., (1990) p44, and see note 169.

[102] Suetonius, *Domitian*, 2.

[103] Statius, *Silvae*, 1. 4. 77-81., 2. 6. 18f., 3. 2. 101, 135f., 4. 1. 40., 4. 2. 49., 4. 3. 137, 154., 4. 4. 30f., 5. 1. 60f., 5. 2. 140f., 5. 3. 185f. Whittaker, C., (2000) p309.

In summary, the older theory of defence during Flavian rule held by Rawlinson and others is quite rightly obsolete given the sheer weight of the evidence. Personalities of different emperors dictated differences in foreign policies, and circumstances like Domitian's premature death all played their own important parts in warding off war between Rome and Parthia, which in the past has been claimed as a sign of a peaceful pact. But, such a pact lacks foundation, and adherents to the old theory of 'Grand Strategy' must take this into consideration because, clearly, peace between the two powers was often pursued grudgingly, as the example of Vespasian's reign shows, not as the result of an entante or strategy. Yet, the repeated postponements in coming to grips had a most advantageous effect on interstate trade, and as peace continued it brought with it much benefit and huge profits to traders traversing both empires.

Trade Between Rome and Parthia in the First Century

This section will demonstrate that during the tenuous peace of the Flavian period there was a thriving continuity of trade between East and West. It is essential to understand this period in order to fully appreciate the momentous implications of the changes in trade that were to follow. Such changes are later covered in this thesis. Knowledge of archaeological findings is essential to understanding this topic, and thus Sartre's monograph, which discusses many such findings in detail, is of great importance and is discussed throughout. Wheeler's *Rome Beyond its Imperial Frontiers* was an early treatment of Roman trade abroad based on contemporaneous archaeological discoveries up until the late 1960s and its legacy has been considerable: even Tomber's *Indo-Roman Trade*, which is a thoroughly up to date work published in 2008, and which draws on scholarship from right around the globe, is inspired by Wheeler's work. Tomber provides readers with a detailed and thoroughly researched exposition of Roman trade beyond the Empire - particularly with India and the East - by drawing upon the provenance and distribution of ceramics as well as other archaeological discoveries made in recent decades. It is thus of immeasurable worth to appreciating the issue of Romano-Parthian trade during this period. It is the aim of this section in particular to highlight the main

themes running through this issue. Thus it serves as a valuable resource of archaeological and literary synthesis, bridging a gap within current scholarship.

Throughout the Flavian period, both the Parthians and Romans had an important stake in inter-state trade. The trade routes that crossed the Near East linking the Roman and Parthian Empires were particularly popular during periods of peace.[104] Public buildings erected at Palmyra, and other cities throughout the eastern provinces, show that large-scale trade there was particularly lucrative.[105] Much of the taxed profits of wealthier provinces in the East like Syria were spent by Rome on the huge standing Roman army as well as to boost agricultural production within the less wealthy provinces in the western Empire like Britain.[106] In addition, the high duty of 25% placed on eastern goods must have served as a financial discouragement for many prospective lower-class buyers.[107] However, that there was sufficient profit left within Syria to build so extensively, regardless of such circumstances, is demonstrative of expansion in both the monetization of the province, and the purchasing power of the richer elements within it.[108] The high duty on goods from the East passing through Syria also increased production and commerce among its inhabitants as they tried to accrue higher profits on account of them.[109]

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[104] Isaac, B., (1990) p140.

[105] Jones, A. H. M., (1974) p127.

[106] Jones, A. H. M., (1974) p127. Garnsey, P., Saller, R., (1987) *The Roman Empire: Economy, Society and Culture*. Duckworth. London. pp55, 56, 62.

[107] Jones, A. H. M., (1974) p129.

[108] Jones, A. H. M., (1974) p127, 129.

[109] Garnsey, P., Saller, R., (1987) p53.

The overland trade route that had the most thoroughfares was the Silk Route.[110] According to Isidore of Charax, who in the first century described the leg of the Silk Route that passed from Antioch to Parthia and its many stations which Parthia established to facilitate trade; the route crossed from China in the east across the steppes to Bactria, from where it forked south to the Indus River, and west through Parthia, along the Euphrates and into Syria,[111] from where goods from the east could be traded around Roman markets.

The leg of the Silk Route which traversed from Antioch to Parthia was described by Isidore in order to provide merchants with information about Parthia's trading stations along the route. They supplied and guarded the caravans that passed through.[112] Along with his testimony, Chinese sources like the *Hou Hanshu* also provide further information about the route. The *Hou Hanshu* was a collection of documents compiled in the fifth century AD, drawing upon a multiplicity of earlier sources, and treated various historical topics going back to the Han dynasty in the first to third centuries. The section of the *Hou Hanshu* which concerns us here is the chapter 'Records About the Western Regions', or *Xiyuzhuan*.[113] It states that the main purpose of the stations, besides sustenance, was to protect travelers from natural hazards including packs of wild animals and geographical obstacles.[114] As there was little threat from bandits, the stations of the Silk Route that passed through the Parthian Empire clearly served their purpose well.[115]

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[110] For an ancient description of the Silk Route through the Parthian Empire, see Isidore of Charax, *Parthian Stations*. For a modern discussion of the Silk Route, see Colledge, M., (1967) pp79ff.

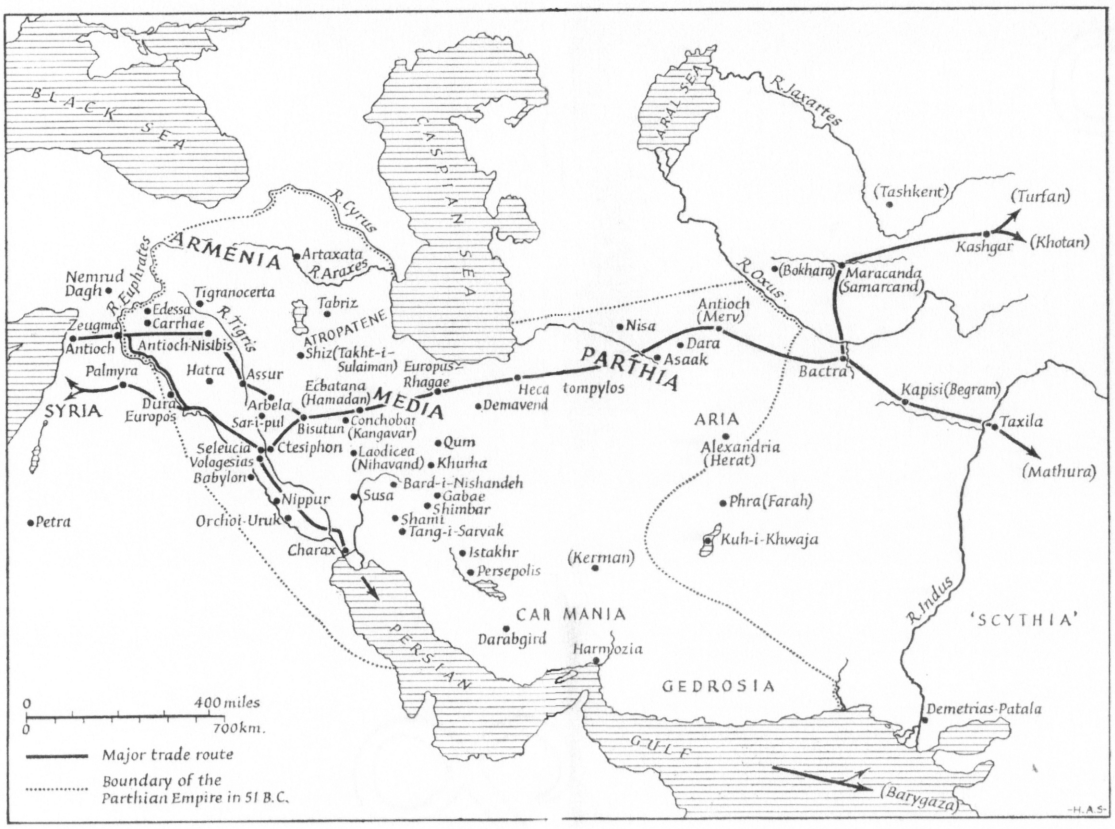
[111] Isidore of Charax, *Parthian Stations*, 1-19.

[112] Isidore of Charax, *Parthian Stations*.

[113] Tao, W., (2007) 'Parthia in China: A Re-Examination of the Historical Records', in Curtis, V., and Stewart, S., (eds.) *The Age of the Parthians*. I. B. Tauris. London. p96.

[114] Tao, W., (2007) p98.

[115] Tao, W., (2007) p98.



The Silk Route Trade network. Source: Colledge, M., (1967) *The Parthians*. Frederick A Praeger. NY. p82.

Another Chinese source, the *Shiji*, was written in the first century BC by the Han court historian Sima Qian and deals mainly with Chinese history. However, one section of it, 'The Records About Ferghana', or the *Dayuan liezhuan*, contains information about trade and commerce within the Parthian Empire.[116] According to it, the Parthians maintained many marketplaces all throughout Mesopotamia which traded Parthian silver coins for goods and wares from China and the Far East.[117] However, not all goods were incoming. In fact the *Shiji* states that the Parthians actively traded their own products in those marketplaces too:

[116] Tao, W., (2007) pp88-89.

[117] Tao, W., (2007) p90.

"[Parthian] people who do business and trade using carts and boats, and they travel to neighbouring countries, sometimes journeying several thousand *li*[118] [to trade]."[119]

Parthian traders carried on extensive exchanges with Roman traders as well as with Chinese. Pliny the Elder stated that various Persian goods such as steel, leather, rhubarb (which was used in antiquity for medicinal purposes), and the peach, were popular in Roman markets.[120] These and other foodstuffs including the pistachio nut and the condiment asafetida were introduced into the Roman Empire via the Silk Route.[121] Parthian food became very popular: the Roman cookery book of Apicius even featured both lamb and chicken "in the Parthian manner".[122] Still, there were many goods that found Roman markets from much further afield than Parthia. Silks from China also arrived in Roman markets from the Silk Route. Once they arrived in Roman territories raw silk would be transported to manufacturers in Phoenicia and Egypt where it would then be dyed and the fabric turned into fashionable garments for Roman markets.[123] In several tower tombs in Palmyra in Syria archaeologists have discovered silks that, upon examination, have been found stamped with the Chinese Hunan province symbol.[124]

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[118] One *li* equals approx 480 meters.

[119] Tao, W., (2007) p90.

[120] On Parthian steel and leather see Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 34. 145. On rhubarb see, 37. 128. On the peach see 15. 44.

[121] On the trade of these and other goods between Rome and Parthia see Kurz, O., (2006) 'Cultural Relations Between Parthia and Rome' in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol 3, No 1, pp560f.

[122] Apicius, 6. 9. 2. Kurz, O, (2006) p564. For the recipe, see Dalby, A., and Grainger, S., (2012) *The Classical Cookbook*. British Museum Press. p133.

[123] Sartre, M., (2007) p242.

[124] Stauffer, A., (1995) 'Kleider, Kissen, bunte Tucher: Einheimische Textilproduktion und weltweiter Handel', in Schmidt-Colinet, A., (ed.) *Palmyra: Kulturbegegnung in Grenzbereich*. Ph von Zabern. Mainz. pp57-71. Faulkenhausen, L., (2000) 'Die Seiden

On the matter as to who actually traded along the Silk Route there has been some debate. According to the ancient Chinese source the *Hanshu*, a first century AD Chinese history not to be confused with the later *Hou Hanshu*, it was the Parthians themselves who utilized it to the exclusion of others:

> "Their [the Romans'] kings always desired to send embassies to China, but the An-his [the Parthians] wished to carry on trade with them in Chinese silks, and it is for this reason that they were cut off from communication This lasted till the ninth year of the Yen-his period during the Emperor Huan-ti's reign [=166AD]."[125]

On account of this evidence, Wheeler has argued that the Parthians alone used the Silk Route throughout Parthian lands, and that the Parthians actually stopped most of the Silk Route goods from crossing the Euphrates and heading onward to Rome out of "active rivalry". Wheeler also argued that the Silk Route's later passing out from Western literature is certain proof of this.[126] However, a decade after Wheeler put forward this claim, Colledge pointed out that the *Han* annals only state that Parthia cut off *communication* alone, between China and Rome, and that the Parthians rather acted as middlemen to reap retail profits. As Colledge himself put it, the Parthians were not blind to their own self-interests, and knew that if they destroyed the east-west trade they in turn destroyed all revenues accrued from it. Instead, they held their two greatest customers firmly apart, and thus avoiding any embarrassing comparison of prices, were able to accrue higher profits.[127]

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mit chinesischen Inscriften', in Schmidt-Colinet, A., Stauffer, A., al-As'ad, K., (eds.) *Die Textilien aus Palmyra: Neue und alte Funde.* Ph von Zabern. Mainz. p60.

[125] Wheeler, M., (1955) *Rome Beyond the Imperial Frontiers*. Philosophical Library. New York.

[126] Wheeler, M., (1955) p154.

[127] Colledge, M., (1967) p80.

In support of his argument, Colledge pointed out that the huge buildings still standing at Hatra and Palmyra show that Parthians and Romans had no issues about trading with each other. The argument is an attractive one. The Chinese *Hanshu* cites an example of a journey to the west by one Gan Ying, who was commissioned by the Chinese Protector-General in AD97 to open communication with Rome. However, when Gan Ying reached either the Persian Gulf or the Mediterranean – the language used is unclear on the matter – he was dissuaded from proceeding any further west by Parthian fishermen. Consequently, the annals state, "When Gan Ying heard this, he stopped his journey."[128] This anecdote may be a reflection of a broader Parthian policy to stall East-West communication that Colledge referred to. Granted, Parthia's subjects sometimes varied in their allegiances to the Parthian king.[129] However, it is likely that these fishermen dissuaded Gan Ying out of a patriotic allegiance to Parthian interests, and that it could be indication of a broader socially accepted allegiance throughout the Parthian Empire.[130] As for the passing of the Silk Route out of western literature, Tomber has found that there is a paucity of Roman pottery around the Persian Gulf in late antiquity due to a decrease in trade because of warfare between Rome and Parthia and later Rome and the Sassanid Persians.[131] Therefore, it was the later political climate that resulted in the decline in Roman knowledge of Eastern markets along the Route that Wheeler noticed.

Colledge's argument is supported in other respects as well. Tao has demonstrated that while the Chinese knew about Parthia and Rome, they had no real appreciation of the regions west of Parthia,[132] which could mean that they did not use the leg of the Silk Route between Parthia and Syria, and further reflects the Parthian policy to debar

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[128] Tao, W., (2007) p100.

[129] Colledge, M., (1967) pp59f.

[130] Although Tao is notably silent on the matter. See Tao, W., (2007) p101.

[131] Tomber, R., (2008) *Indo-Roman Trade: From Pots to Pepper*. Duckworth. London. p114.

[132] Tao, W., (2007) pp100-101.

foreigners from using the route. Indeed, it must be emphasized that Isidore himself was not a Roman but was from Characene which was located at the mouth of the Persian Gulf in Parthian territory. As a conclusion, it follows that the Parthians actively deterred all contact between Rome and her other markets in the Far East, but they did not stall trade between them at all. Rather, they facilitated east-west trade but monopolized its activity while that trade was carried on throughout their own territories.

However, this in turn begs the questions: if Isidore knew about the details of the Route, did he know this from first-hand experience? And if so, who else had first hand experience? We have discussed how it is maintained that the Parthians controlled the route. However it is necessary to clarify who these 'Parthians' were. The evidence suggests that it was not the Parthians (i.e. the Parni from Parthia itself) alone who conducted trade, but rather that their subjects were the ones who mostly utilized it. Local knowledge was of prime importance to the caravans and merchants who were passing through Parthian territories, and indeed, each region's population supported and facilitated the trade that ran through it. During the first century when the Parthian Empire was fragmented with liberation struggles taking place within it,[133] trade was still conducted throughout. As a result, Keall has found that in the Mesopotamian and Tigris kingdoms, which like Babylonia, Elymais and Characene, were autonomous, trade passing through their lands were still controlled by those same local kingdoms.[134] Clearly, they had a longstanding stake in trade that they could exploit independently without Parthia's interference.

Once the various Parthian kingdoms became familiar with the surplus and goods they could reap from it, taking part in trading ventures must have seemed all the more appealing. In fact this seems to have been the case with the inhabitants at Hatra, a Parthian city founded to the east of the Euphrates around AD50. It clearly benefited from trade, as imported luxury goods from Roman Palmyra to the west including sculptures

[133] Keall, E., (1975) pp620-624.

[134] Keall, E., (1975) pp620-624.

have been found by archaeologists there.[135] Archaeologists have also found at Zeugma, the major Roman frontier city on the Euphrates, many luxurious houses built there that are all dated to the first century.[136]

Archaeologists working at Dura-Europos, which was taken over by Parthia around 113BC,[137] and was located on the mid-Euphrates region with a population of around 5,000 inhabitants, have also found evidence that it too benefited from the exchange of ideas between Rome and Parthia. There, archaeologists discovered that the cultures of Roman and Parthian traders blended in a cosmopolitan hub so successfully that the city was even able to export its blended ideas abroad. Archaeologists studying the remains at Dura-Europos found that religion and titulature in Dura was heavily influenced by Greek, Roman and Parthian religious symbolism. Thus, while Greek gods were among the pantheon worshipped there, their cults were purely Semitic in form.[138] In fact, it seems that throughout the frontier zone between the Roman and Parthian Empires, there was much cultural bleeding-through on both sides of the Euphrates. Hence, Palmyrene traders traded with Parthia, while at Dura-Europos Graeco-Roman culture also had its place.[139]

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[135] Al Salihi, Wathiq I., (1987) 'Palmyrene Sculptures Found at Hatra' in *Iraq*, Vol 49.

[136] Abadie-Reynal, C., Ergec, R., et al. (1997)'Mission de Zeugma-Moyenne Vallee de l'Euphrate' in *Anatolia Antiqua* 5 in Sartre, M., (2007) p180.

[137] Hopkins, C., (1979) *The Discovery of Dura-Europos*. Yale University Press. New Haven. p256.

[138] Rostovtzeff, M., (1938) *Dura-Europos and its Art*. Oxford Clarendon Press. pp17, 46.

[139] Dirven, L., (1999) *The Palmyrenes of Dura-Europos. A Study of Religious Interaction in Roman Syria*. E J Brill. Leiden. p294. Dirven's point, however, that the temple of Bel in Dura-Europos was actually at temple of Zeus in the Parthian period is open to question. Pekary has suggested that the temple was actually dedicated in Roman times to the third-century Roman emperors Pupienus, Balbinus and Gordian III. See, Pekary, T., (1994) *Ausgewahlte kleine Schriften. Pharos: Studien zur griechisch-romischen Antike*. Scripta Mercturae. Verlag. p188. Millar, F., (2001) 'The Palmyrenes of Dura-Europos. A

Citizens there also used Macedonian-Greek official titles whether they were Greek or Semitic, and their gods, religious symbols and ceremonies were heavily influenced by the prevailing syncretisms of Graeco-Roman culture.[140] However, this formalized nod to prevailing empires was nominal. At Dura-Europos the use of Greek and Macedonian titles in civic administration did not mean that the holders of high office were Greek. In fact, they were often Semitic and only used such titles like 'strategos' for the sake of convention.[141] Papyri from Dura-Europos show that during the town's Parthian period, the Parthians were able to make use of such convention and controlled the town effectively through its existing hierarchies and civic structures.[142]

At Roman Palmyra as well, reliefs dated to this period found by archaeologists show harmonious Roman and Parthian influences, depicting Palmyrene gods wearing Roman cuirasses and Parthian trousers and shoes.[143] Sartre points out that at this time such influence was never forced onto local cities by either Rome or Parthia, but was rather

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Study of Religious Interaction in Roman Syria by L. A. Dirven', in *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol 91, pp204-205.

[140] Hopkins, C., (1931) 'The Palmyrene Gods at Dura-Europos', in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol 51 No 2 (June) pp119-137. Pollard, N., (2007) 'Colonial and Cultural Identities in Parthian and Roman Dura-Europos', in Alston, R., and Lieu, S., (eds.) *Aspects of the Roman East: Papers in Honour of Professor Fergus Millar FBA*. Brepols Publishers. Turnhout. pp81-101.

[141] Pollard, N., (2007) 'Colonial and Cultural Identities in Parthian and Roman Dura-Europos', in Alston, R., and Lieu, S., (eds.) *Aspects of the Roman East: Papers in Honour of Professor Fergus Millar FBA*. Brepols Publishers. Turnhout. pp81-101.

[142] Welles, B., Fink, R., Gilliam, J., (eds. and trans.) *The Excavations at Dura Europos, Final Report, Vol 5, Part 1: The Parchments and Papyri*. Yale University Press. New Haven. (1959). 20. Edwell, P., (2008) p113.

[143] Rostovtzeff, M., (1932) 'The Caravan-Gods of Palmyra', in *Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol 22, Part 1, pp107-116. See especially pp108 and 113, and plates 25, 26 and 27.

adopted, and adapted, by the locals who were impressed with what they had to offer.[144] Consequently, as Oates has found, the Euphrates, although a marker of the boundary of empire, was never considered a barrier to general human movement for the purpose of trade.[145] Rather it was a highway of large scale commerce between the East and the West for the advantage of those on both sides of the river.[146]

As a result, the archaeological evidence from Roman Zeugma and Palmyra, and Parthian Hatra and Dura-Europos, shows that the Silk Route was in fact not exclusively the domain of the Parthians themselves. Certainly, they controlled it, and in doing so facilitated its use considerably, but it is clear that during the first century AD it was mainly left to Parthia's subjects, and its independent peripheral states, who used, maintained and invested heavily in it. As for the statement in the *Hanshu* that the Parthians exploited the route and barred all others from doing so, the archaeological evidence shows that we should not take this too literally. As Isidore himself put it, between the Euphrates and Parthia's empire's borders to the east everything was under the rule of the Parthians,[147] and so it is they alone who in antiquity were ultimately accorded the Silk Route's use. Parthia's subjects were allowed by their Parthian masters to exploit the Silk Route for their own purposes, provided they did not challenge the authority of the Arsacids' stipulations regulating it.

However, the Silk Route was not the only trade superhighway in the first century. As alluring as the route was to Babylonians, Elymeans, Characeans, and others, maritime trade throughout the Indian Ocean which linked the Far East with the Persian Gulf and the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers was of equal appeal and importance. By all accounts the

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[144] Sartre, M. (2007) p171.

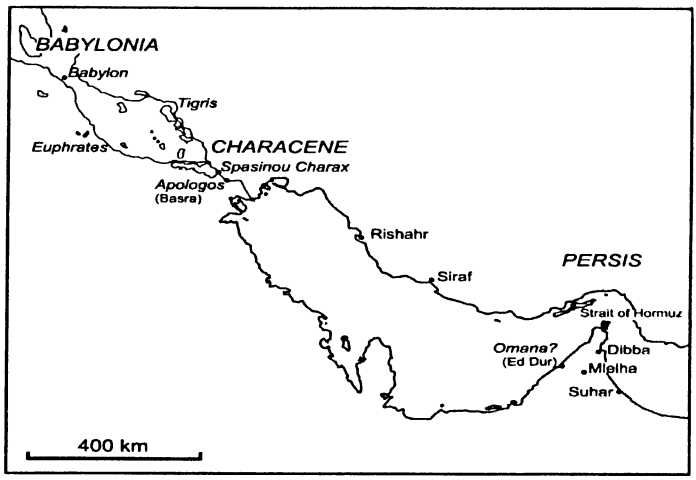
[145] Oates, D., (1956) 'The Roman Frontier in Northern Iraq', in *The Geographical Journal*, Vol 122, No 2 (June) p193.

[146] Oates, D., (1956) p193.

[147] Isidore of Charax, *Parthian Stations*, 19. "As far as this place [north-west India] the land is under the rule of the Parthians."

Parthians took it very seriously. Archaeologists have found the remains of port cities all around the Persian Gulf, including Rishahr and Siraf on Iran's coast, and Ed Dur, Mleiha, Suhar and Dibba on Arabia's coast near the Strait of Hormuz – all of which facilitated trade around the Indian Ocean.[148]

The Persian Gulf itself was a thriving hub of Parthian activity, and as a result Mesopotamian ceramics including 'Torpedo' amphorae, dominate archaeological sites around the Gulf. Also, just like the Silk Route traders, the Gulf traders imported goods as well. At Dibba, Roman glassware and jewelry have been discovered by archaeologists[149] even though the dominance of torpedo jars glazed ware from this period show that at this time the Gulf was entirely removed from Roman control.[150]



The Persian Gulf. Source: Tomber, R., (2008) *Indo-Roman Trade*. Duckworth. London. p110.

In fact the Persian Gulf continued to be so busy with Parthian trading vessels that even at the height of Trajan's war with Parthia, Parthian trading ships were still active

[148] For a full discussion of Persian Gulf Parthian ports see Tomber, R., (2008) pp109ff.

[149] Jasim, S., (2006) 'Trade Centres and Commercial Routes in the Arabian Gulf: Post Hellenistic Discoveries at Dibba, Sharjah, United Arab Emirates', in *Arabian Archaeology and Ethnography*, Vol 17, pp214-237.

[150] Tomber, R., (2008) p109.

around the Gulf - according to Dio, when Trajan reached the Gulf himself he saw a Parthian ship sailing off bound for India.[151]

Roman merchants also took an increasingly serious view of Indian Ocean trade too. Coin hoards from the Julio-Claudian period have been found at Indian ports such as Coimbatore and Karur,[152] and thousands of amphorae fragments have been found around India's coastlines.[153] In fact, in 2010 archaeologists working in Pattanam in southern India even discovered an amphora that was manufactured as far west as Catalan in southern Spain during the 1st century AD.[154] This type of demand in India, therefore, reflects a familiarity with Roman goods that must have been created and fostered by Roman merchants.

In fact the exchange of goods between the Roman and Parthian Empires increased to such an extent that by the early 2nd century Romans like Juvenal would complain that for too long there had been excessive amounts of cargoes of Eastern goods arriving in Rome from the Silk Route via Antioch.[155] But in this time of relative stability in a frontier encompassing the Rome's east and Parthia's west, Juvenal's remarks reflect a divergence in thinking in Rome between those Romans on the one hand, who felt a bitterness for the *otherness* in Orientals, and the merchants on the other, who were making a good living by befriending and trading with Orientals who were to them *familiar*. It was a social divergence noted by Mattingly, who placed the colonial stereotypes propagated by the

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[151] Cassius Dio, 68. 29. 1.

[152] Turner, P., (1989) *Roman Coins From India*. Institute of Archaeology Occasional Publication. London. 12. pp5, 59-60. See also Tomber, R., (2008) p139.

[153] Tomber, R., (2008) p117f.

[154] Radhakrishnam, M., (2009) 'First Century Spanish Pottery Found in Pattanam', in *India Today*, (7th December) www.indiatoday.intoday.in/site/story/First+century+spanish+pottery+found+in+Patternam/1/73920.html

[155] Juvenal, *Satires*, 3. 62.

Roman elite in order to dehumanize and make conquest over foreigners more palatable on the one hand, and the indigenous cultrures on the other who struggled to resist.[156] However, the need to make a living and forge a commercial empire would remain despite such politically robust conditions.

[156] Mattingly, D., (2011) *Imperialism, Power and Identity*. Princeton University Press. pp204, 215.

Trajan and Parthia

The motivation behind Trajan's invasion is disputed among modern scholars and is one that is discussed in this section in order to arrive at a balanced conclusion. On one side: Bennett's *Trajan*, and Bowersock's *Roman Arabia* maintain that Trajan had wished to emulate Alexander for a long time as Cassius Dio believed. However, on the other side are Lepper's *Trajan's Parthian War*, Birley's *Hadrian*, Sheldon's *Rome's Wars in Parthia*, and Griffin's article entitled 'Nerva to Hadrian' in the *Cambridge Ancient History*, Vol 11 which claim that Dio as a source of information on Trajan's motives for war with Parthia, is wholly untrustworthy. In this thesis a more persuasive argument is put forward: that Trajan had indeed made plans, although they were tentative, to invade Parthia, but that the evidence often used to support such a case are not convincing. By tracing the historical debate it will become clear that although planning was in place, a Parthian war was not finally decided upon by Trajan until he had first conquered Armenia.

The principates of Trajan and Hadrian were turning points in Romano-Parthian relations. The status quo was already been discussed. What follows is how it was overhauled directly as a result of Trajan's Parthian war and the policies of Hadrian. It will be shown that Trajan's war had a negative economic impact on the Near East that Rome, through its Syrian city Palmyra, was able to exploit for its own mercantile purposes. Therefore, a discussion of Trajan's monumental war, its failure, and Hadrian's eastern policy, require establishing.

According to Dio and Fronto, Trajan's motivation for invading Parthia was simply the pursuit of military glory.[157] Indeed, even today, few imagine that Trajan was motivated

[157] Cassius Dio, 68. 7. 5, 17. 1. Fronto, *Princ Hist*, 2. 213 para 14, 207 para 10.

by sole concern for the stability of the Roman Empire itself, although Ferguson is an exception.[158] Many historians are convinced that Trajan had self-serving plans in mind, but they usually differ in respect to what form they took. Bennet imagined that Trajan's sole motive was that he wished to recapture the vigour of his youth.[159] Others, like Bowersock, have argued that Trajan's plans germinated well before the invasion as he entertained hopes of re-enacting Alexander's conquest of Iran during the time when Arabia was annexed.[160] Such conflicting views require fresh reappraisal of debate surrounding Trajan's motivations for war.

Sheldon has argued that Trajan's invasion was planned for years beforehand due to his general policy of conquest wherever possible. He had conquered Dacia and annexed Arabia and now, in endless desire for glory, all hesitation about feasibility was put aside.[161] However, this argument was countered by Lepper, who in 1948 argued that Trajan decided upon the invasion of Mesopotamia upon finding Armenia easy to conquer.[162] It is a view still held today by Griffin, who sees the campaigns in Dacia and Mesopotamia as resulting from immediate concerns, rather than premeditation.[163] Birley agrees, and has argued that for the sake of securing Rome's interests in Armenia, which lay open to Parthian influence, Trajan had little option but to add Mesopotamia to his conquests.[164] The susceptibility of Armenia to Parthia was obvious, and to remove it as

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[158] Ferguson, R., (2005) p11.

[159] Bennett, J., (1997) p189-190.

[160] Bowersock, G., (1983) *Roman Arabia*. Cambridge University Press. London. pp82, 85.

[161] Sheldon, R. M., (2010) p127.

[162] Lepper, F., (1948) *Trajan's Parthian War*. Oxford University Press. London. p188f.

[163] Griffin, M., (2000) 'Nerva to Hadrin', in *The Cambridge Ancient History*, Vol 11, p126.

[164] Lepper, F., (1948) pp207-209. Birley, A., (1997) *Hadrian: The Restless Emperor*. Routledge. London. p70.

sticking point between Rome and Parthia Trajan realized that he had to remove the threat of Parthia as well.

However, in this dissertation a return to the evidence, and the nature of the evidence, is adopted, which shows that some planning was in place for a Parthian war, although the final decision to invade Parthia came only after success in Armenia. The ancient literature is clear that by Trajan's time many Romans knew that Parthia was a greater military power than Armenia.[165] Trajan, who exploited intelligence gathering,[166] must have had knowledge of fighting conditions in Parthia. In short, he had laid the necessary intelligence groundwork before the invasion and that in itself is an indication of Trajan's own intentions leading up to his Parthian war.

When we turn to theories put forward by some modern historians for lengthy premeditation to invade Parthia, however, their evidence falls back upon itself. That is not to say that Trajan had not planned a war with Parthia; it is the argument of this thesis that he had. However, the evidence often cited by historians to support it is flawed. It is my aim to correct this tendency. For one thing, take the matter of Pliny the Younger's atypical appointment by Trajan as procurator of Bithynia in 110. Levick has argued that the general military 'balance' of frontier policy was shifting towards the north-east from this point on. She argues that Roman arms had reached their geographical limits in the

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[165] As Plutarch states, the Romans had learnt that lesson with the defeat of Crassus in 53BC: "...they [the Roman army] had believed that the Parthians were just the same as the Armenians or even the Cappadocians whom Lucullus had gone on plundering until he was tired of it... now, however, they found themselves in the unexpected position of having to face real fighting and great danger [in the Parthians]." (Plutarch, *Crassus*, 18.) Furthermore, Suetonius, and many other Romans also knew that Julius Caesar had laid tentative plans to gain intelligence and invade Parthia before his assassination: "...an attack on Parthia by way of Lesser Armenia; but he decided not to risk a pitched battle until he had familiarized himself with Parthian tactics." (Suetonius, *Julius Caesar*, 44.)

[166] Arrian, *Parthica*, frag. 41.

west and south of the empire, but they were still being pushed towards - and beyond - the Danube and Euphrates Rivers. Consequently, Levick concludes that Pliny's mission was to facilitate troop movement to the east, and that it came early in a long process of political shift towards the north-east culminating in the founding of Constantinople.[167] But Levick's argument follows Cuntz, who raised the idea that Pliny's appointment was in preparation for a Parthian war in 1926.[168] However, Lepper discounted it,[169] pointing out that there is no evidence for Cuntz' argument in Pliny's letters and therefore should be treated tentatively. As Lepper clarified, Pliny's own writings show that his appointment to Bithynia was more for accountancy and policing purposes: cities' accounts were checked, and local disturbances and inefficiencies were his primary concerns.[170] Certainly, Levick's suggestion of a policy shift reaching back to Pliny is an anachronism: neither Trajan nor Pliny could foresee the rise of Sassanid Persia which had a marked effect on Roman foreign policy. Nor did they foresee Constantinople's foundation.

Other historians have traced Trajan's interest in a Parthian War even further back than 110. Griffin, for one, points out that in 100, Dio Chrysostom began publicly comparing Trajan with Alexander the Great.[171] Of course, Cassius Dio believed strongly that Trajan was driven on with an unending passion to win renown and emulate his hero Alexander in the East,[172] and indeed his account of Trajan's campaign in the East does read like a tour, with Trajan visiting Gaugamela and burning incense to the spirit of Alexander at

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[167] On the various theories for Pliny's appointment as governor and for Levick's own conclusions see Levick, B., (1979) 'Pliny in Bithynia – And What Followed', in *Greece and Rome*, 2nd Series, Vol 26, No 2 (October) pp122, 125, 126-130.

[168] Cuntz, O., (1926) 'Zum Briefwechsel des Plinius mit Traian', in *Hermes*, Vol 61, p192f.

[169] Lepper, F., (1948) pp165-170.

[170] Lepper, F., (1948) p169.

[171] Griffin, M., (2000) pp100-101.

[172] Cassius Dio, 68. 7. 5., 68. 17. 1., 68. 29. 1.

Babylon. Indeed, many other Romans had also been compared with Alexander, like Pompey, who adopted the cognomen 'The Great'. However, even Pompey's military conquests were only a fraction of the Macedonian king's own.

In fact, all modern attempts to find grounds for longstanding plans on Trajan's part to invade Parthia are discounted by Lepper. That is because they draw from the same arguments put forward in the early twentieth century which were all addressed by Lepper in 1948. A case in point is Sheldon's case for longstanding design,[173] which can be accounted for on every point by Lepper's evidence. Sheldon's case comprises of five counts: 1) Hadrian's appointment to a command in the east in 112, 2) numismatic evidence from 111/12-13 bearing the words FORT[una] RED[ux] (Fortune who guides back), 3) coins in 111 commemorating the deification of M. Ulpius Traianus, 4) the restoration of the Via Egnatia in 112, 5) the annexation of Arabia. The first three, points, draw upon arguments raised by Guey and Strack in the early twentieth century. According to Sheldon, on the first count - a count actually raised by Guey in 1937,[174] Hadrian's appointment which she assumes he held without break until 117 must have been made in order to mobilize the eastern provinces for a Parthian War. However the *Historia Augusta* states that there was indeed a break between his first legateship and his governorship of Syria in 117,[175] and the chronology in Dio makes it clear that Hadrian's later major command took place only in the final stages of Trajan's life.[176] Although Hadrian may have been sent on by Trajan to Athens in the interval between these two

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[173] Sheldon, R., (2010) pp126-127.

[174] Guey, J., (1937) *Essai sur la Guerre Parthique de Trajan.* Bibliotheque d'Istros. No 2. Bucharest. pp27-28.

[175] 'Hadrian', *Historia Augusta*, 4. 1.

[176] Cassius Dio, 68-69. See Lepper, F., (1948) pp171-172. Birley agrees with the *Historia Augusta* as well as Dio. According to Birley, between Hadrian's first legateship and his commission during the Parthian war, he spent time in Rome and Athens in recreation, until the influence of Plotina secured Hadrian a place in Trajan's staff as the princeps passed through Athens on his way to the East. See Birley, A., (1997) pp67-68.

commands in anticipation of a coming war in the East, there is nothing to suggest where, besides Armenia, that theatre of war would be.

Sheldon's second and third points were based on Strack's arguments made in 1931.[177] In any case, the coins seeking Fortuna to return Trajan from abroad could have been aimed at the emperor's safe return from Armenia rather than Parthia, and indeed are closer chronologically to Trajan's Armenian expedition than his Parthian one. In addition, coins commemorating Trajan's biological father's deification should be seen in light of Trajan's general approach to his memory. About that time Trajan established two new legions, the *II Traiana* and the *XXX Ulpia Victrix*.[178] Although Sheldon draws attention to Traianus' victories over Parthia, Lepper has noted that these two legions were originally created for service in Dacia and Arabia.[179] As a result these can be discounted too. Trajan's memory of his father was based solely upon a war with Parthia, but was one that he commemorated by various means.

The restoration of the Via Egnatia and the annexation of Arabia can be explained too. Trajan sought about restoring a number of roads throughout his reign including the Via Traiana from Beneventum to Brundisium. In any case, the Via Egnatia extended east so far as Byzantium, and milestones found along the Via by archaeologists show that the coins which commemorated the restoration in 112 were struck three to four years after the event, well before the Parthian war.[180] The Via Egnatia could therefore have been restored to serve Roman purposes in Dacia, still newly conquered, rather than a Parthian war lying seven years off. Furthermore, there is no evidence that the annexation of Arabia was a precursor to war with Parthia. If it was, one would expect the movement of troops

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[177] Strack, P., (1931) *Untersuchungen zur romischen Reichspragung des zweiten Jahrhunderts*. W. Kohlhammer. Stuttgart. On FORT[una] RED[ux] coins see pp215-216. On coins commemorating Traianus' deification see pp199-202.

[178] Cassius Dio, 55. 24. 4.

[179] Lepper, F., (1948) p173.

[180] Lepper, F., (1948) pp164-165.

to have been effectively different: during the Parthian War, the *II Traiana* and the *XXX Ulpia Victrix* were both engaged in Mesopotamia[181] meaning Arabia was thereby depleted of Roman garrisons during the war. This undermines the whole point of keeping Arabia in check during a war with Parthia if indeed there was such a point. Therefore, Sheldon's whole case must be revised in light of established scholarship.

When we turn to the meeting Trajan had with the Parthian envoy in Athens on his way to the East, we can perceive the emperor's intentions and their tentative state. According to Dio the Parthian ambassador lobbied for Parthia's claims over Armenia and for the renewal of alliance. Trajan's reply is revealing: that friendship is determined by deeds and that "when he [Trajan] should reach Syria he would do all that was proper."[182] Dio considered such words a rebuttal and declaration of war, and indeed they are a rebuttal. But they did not go as far as an actual declaration of war: Trajan had maintained that in a 'proper' arrangement peace could still be attained. What that 'proper' arrangement entailed is not disclosed, but clearly a Parthian war was still only optional even at that late stage.

As for the extent to which Trajan planned for his conquest, that was made clear by the princeps himself when setting eyes upon the Persian Gulf. When he saw a ship sailing from there onto India the princeps remarked: "I should certainly have crossed over to the Indi, too, *if I were still young*".[183] In this one quote, which is often misconstrued as an admission by Trajan that he was seeking to emulate Alexander; is actually a clear sign that Trajan had differentiated himself from the Macedonian king. The words "if I were still young" signify that Trajan had recognized certain limitations about his ability to lead any further eastward. Thus Trajan was admitting the limits of his conquests in that one remark. Although Ball has argued that this might have been the first time Trajan had ever

[181] Lepper, F., (1948) pp173-178.

[182] Cassius Dio, 68. 17. 2.

[183] Cassius Dio, 68. 29. 1.

given his age any recognition[184] such a protest does not take into consideration the fact that no plans were put into effect to extend Roman control beyond the Gulf, nor that Trajan's acceptance of triumphs and the title *Parthicus* just prior to the Gulf excursion[185]. Clearly, the princeps had foreseen an end to his campaigning leading up to his Gulf expedition; and had noticed his obvious aging for quite some time already. It was with this in mind, no doubt, that the princeps kept a Parthian war as a possibility, not a foregone conclusion, for so long; and it was probably this which led to his shrouded remarks to the Parthian envoys in Athens - not for war or against it. Aging is an obvious progression, and Trajan had noticed his own, and therefore questioned the feasibility of conquering all of Parthia's empire and indeed a Parthian war at all. It was only the attractiveness of Mesopotamia's riches, and the civil war in Iran detaining Parthia's forces to the east, which finally tipped the scale in war's favour.

This leads one to pose the question: what was Trajan's motivation if not to follow in the footsteps of Alexander? The answer no doubt lies within the nature of his conquered territories. By marching down into Mesopotamia to the Persian Gulf, Trajan had displayed that his main intention was to occupy the trade arteries down the Two Rivers and Persian Gulf access to the Indian Ocean. It is an obvious conclusion to draw, but it is an important one too. Trajan had no intention of conquering the whole of the Parthian Empire. Rather, he was more interested in procuring the riches of a leg of the Silk Route and the wealth of the Gulf and its trade with India. Up until that point Romans had access to the Indian Ocean via the Red Sea, and archaeological evidence along its shores shows that the Red Sea saw much thoroughfare, particularly in the form of maritime trade, with foodstuffs, textiles, gems, and pottery, among other things being traded along its coasts,[186] but by comparison the Persian Gulf was far more lucrative. The Red Sea had few harbours and many pirates, and the Romans had been on the lookout for an

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[184] Ball, W., (2000) p16.

[185] On this see Cassius Dio, 68. 28. 2-4.

[186] On Roman use of the Red Sea for trade with the East, see Tomber, R., (2008) pp57-87.

alternative route to India for some time.[187] Consequently, when Trajan stormed and overran Armenia with success, he observed the civil chaos in Parthia's east and surmised that the time was perfect for him and his legions to invade its east and thus take control of an extremely rich stretch of territory with its many markets. As Birley put it, after his resounding success in Armenia and upon observing the civil chaos that was engulfing Parthia at that time, Trajan *only then* finally decided to embark on a Parthian war.[188]

As a result, with due care a picture emerges which points to the soundness of the argument that Trajan's war had been planned years previously. But it was not a plan as far-reaching as Alexander's own. Nor was it decided upon irresolvably by the emperor to undertake. Rather, it was kept alive as a possibility, and only once buoyed with success in Armenia did Trajan come to his final decision to invade Parthia's western regions. The Parthian armies were preoccupied waging civil war to the east,[189] and Trajan made his move on the west. Thus, Trajan, who knew that the Parthians would prove themselves to be a very different kind of enemy than the Armenians, was quick to take advantage of their moment of weakness and stake his claim to Mesopotamia. It would also serve to secure Armenia, which had been so often a sticking point for Parthia and Rome over the last century and a half. But the Parthians had calculated on such an invasion while their armies were detained elsewhere. They had incited the peoples of Mesopotamia and the Jews of the eastern provinces of the Roman Empire to revolt in Trajan's rear in his moment of triumph.

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[187] Starr, C., (1993) *The Roman Imperial Navy 31BC-AD324*. Ares Publishers Inc. Chicago. p175.

[188] There were at that point three contestants for the Arsacid throne – Pacorus, Vologases and Osroes. See Birley, A., (1997) p65.

[189] Cassius Dio, 68. 26. 4(2).

Trajan's Parthian War

To understand the impact Trajan's Parthian war had on trade between the Roman and Parthian empires it is essential to appreciate the war itself. It had a lasting legacy on trade between them as the Syrian city Palmyra asserted its dominance over trans-Euphrates commerce during the years that followed - partly the result of Trajan's war and partly the result of Hadrian's policy - thus furthering Rome's economic interests there. Although it could be said that Palmyra had far more success in solidifying a place of prominence in the region than Trajan did, since Palmyrene mercantile power would last for over a century after Trajan's death, it must also be recognized that without Trajan's dramatic intervention that city could not have succeeded as it did.

On the subject of Trajan's invasion Lepper's narrative in *Trajan's Parthian War* contains a detailed modern account and general discussion, while Gilliver's *The Roman Art of War* treats the operation of the Roman army. Gilliver's monograph treats general warfare conditions involving the two empires and is thus invaluable for comprehending a war largely unchronicled in the extant ancient literature. Mention should also be made of Lightfoot's article, 'Trajan's Parthian War and the Fourth-Century Perspective' in *The Journal of Roman Studies*, which argues the point that value of fourth century Roman historians is essential regarding details of Trajan's war. Although Lightfoot's conclusions are found dubious in this paper, they are nonetheless a reflection of a broad trend in modern scholarship to refer to them upon discussing the war. In fact, it will be shown that fourth century sources preserve a later echo of the tradition Cassius Dio drew upon.

Admittedly, Trajan's campaign was initially a success. In 114 he marched his army through Syria into Cappadocia and then onto Armenia which he promptly took and made into a Roman province, ejecting Parthamasiris, the Parthian nominee, from its throne. Trajan then marched south, and captured Nisibis and Batnae. At this point, Dio states, Trajan was voted the name of *Parthicus* by the Roman Senate[190] However, Trajan would

[190] Cassius Dio, 68. 23. 2.

not accept this title until he believed that his achievements in the East warranted it, and adopted it only after he captured Ctesiphon. After garrisoning Nisibis and Batnae, Trajan then marched to Edessa where he spent the winter. The next spring, the emperor then advanced through Adiabene and took Singara without a battle. With winter approaching again, Trajan returned to Antioch. In 116, in the following spring, Trajan marched east as far as the Tigris River. While trying to bridge it he was finally met by a detachment of the Parthian army who tried to disrupt his crossing, but they had little success and Trajan's army pressed on.

The conspicuous lack of appearance of Parthian armies up to this point, Dio stated, was thanks to a Parthian civil war further to the east which embroiled all their military forces against each other.[191] Unhindered, Trajan found his progress almost entirely unopposed and as a result he proceeded through Adiabene to the east of the Tigris and found he could take control there. According to Dio this was an area of Assyria, called 'Atyria' by the locals who pronounced the S as T.[192] If Dio is correct, then this must have been included in the province of 'Assyria' that Trajan later established. This resolves the confusion felt by Bivar and Lightfoot over the question of the exact location of Trajan's province of Assyria. In 1983, Bivar argued that Cassius Dio's statement about Trajan's crossing of the Tigris was erroneous, and argued that Dio made it simply because he believed that Assyria was to the east of the Tigris, whereas in fact that designation was obsolete in Trajan's day and was actually located between the Euphrates and Tigris. He then adds that Trajan's triumphal arch at Dura-Europos implies that the emperor was active there by the Euphrates rather than east of the Tigris in 116.[193] Bivar's line of argument follows that of Debevoise, who in 1938 pointed to Zosimus' and Ammianus Marcellinus' statements that there existed a tribunal throne of Trajan's at Ozogardana, southeast of Dura on the Euphrates bank.[194] However, Ammianus based his claim on the

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[191] Cassius Dio, 68. 26.

[192] Cassius Dio, 68. 26. 4(1).

[193] Bivar, A., (1983) p89.

[194] Debevoise, N., (1938) p232.

testimony of locals who made much of it during Julian's Persian campaign.[195] But such testimony was no doubt in order to curry favour with Julian and his invading army, because Zosimus wrote that later those same locals had ceased identifying the stone 'throne' with Trajan.[196] However, the testimonies of sources from late antiquity still loom large: in 1990 Lightfoot expanded on Debevoise's and Bivar's arguments,[197] and pointed out other statements of fourth century Sassanid and Roman writers. Lightfoot points out that the Sassanids called the lower Mesopotamian region 'Asuristan', and according to Lightfoot, both Festus and Ammianus Marcellinus believed that Trajan's campaigns proceeded only as far as the Tigris, and that, therefore, Assyria was located in this 'Asuristan'.[198]

However, close scrutiny of the sources leaves both Bivar's and Lightfoot's articulate arguments open to challenge. For one thing, Dio's designation of Assyria was not obsolete in Trajan's day, for if was it outdated for the locals beyond the eastern banks of the Tigris they would not have call their homeland 'Assyria' as Dio stated. For another, there is the arch at Dura-Europos. Bivar has argued that Trajan erected it for his capture of that city.[199] However it was probably built after Trajan's capture of Ctesiphon when the Senate voted him a triumph,[200] and a triumphal arch in Rome.[201] It is also unclear how Trajan appeared in Babylonia if he had been detained at Dura-Europos. However, if Trajan had indeed marched down the Tigris and entered Babylonia from there as Dio

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[195] Ammianus Marcellinus, 24. 2.

[196] Zosimus, 3. 15.

[197] Lightfoot, C., (1990) 'Trajan's Parthian War and the Fourth-Century Perspective', in *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol 80, pp115-126.

[198] Festus, *Breviarium of the Accomplishments of the Roman People*, 10, 20., Ammianus Marcellinus, *Roman History*, 23. 6. 15-23.

[199] Bivar, A., (1983) p89.

[200] Cassius Dio, 68. 28. 3.

[201] Cassius Dio, 68. 29. 3.

stated,[202] that would account for his immediate appearance there soon thereafter. Numismatic evidence lends support to this scenario, for Parthian bronze coins circulated freely throughout western Babylonia during Trajan's march south. The consistent distribution of coinage indicates that the economy of the population there was unaffected by the war, so it was thus missed by Trajan's army.[203] Therefore, the probability that Trajan's army progressed elsewhere, i.e. east of the Tigris, is convincing. Of course, coin distribution data can not emphatically prove broader social conditions, but taken with Dio, a march down the east of the Tigris, rather that directly into Babylonia along the Euphrates, is the most plausible conclusion.

Cassius Dio and the fourth century sources clarify what territory Trajan's newly annexed provinces of Armenia, Mesopotamia and Assyria, consisted of which again brings Lightfoot's and Bivar's arguments into question. Dio stated that from Adiabene Trajan marched south along the east bank of the Tigris whereupon he later crossed into Babylonia,[204] and this is actually supported by evidence predating Dio by a century. An inscription on the base of a statue of Herakles etched by Vologases V, discovered by archaeologists at Seleucia in 1984, which commemorates his recapture of Characene, located in the areas central to and east of modern-day Kuwait, for Parthia shows that after Trajan's death Characene was a staunch client-kingdom-like kingdom under Rome's influence from Trajan's Parthian war onwards until then.[205] Furthermore, efforts by Vologases IV in 161 to retake Elymais, a territory located to the east of Characene and the Tigris precisely through where Dio stated Trajan marched, proved unsuccessful.[206]

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[202] Cassius Dio, 68. 26.

[203] On this numismatic evidence and its implications, see Keall, E., (1975) p629.

[204] Cassius Dio, 68. 26.

[205] Keall, E., (1975) p632. Gawlikowski, M., (1994) 'Palmyra as a Trading Centre', in *Iraq*, Vol 56, pp27-33.

[206] Gawlikowski, M., (1994) p29. See also Wenke, R., (1981) 'Elymeans, Parthians, and the Evolution of Empires in Southwestern Iran', in *The Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol 101, No 3, (July-September) p310.

One also detects within the fourth century sources a tradition that Trajan had campaigned well beyond where Bivar and Lightfoot argue. Festus did indeed believe Trajan annexed only the area between the two rivers, but Festus also assumed it contained part of Persia which was located to the Tigris' east:

> "[Trajan] received and maintained Anthemusia – Persia's finest region – Seleucia, Ctesiphon and Babylon; and, after Alexander, even reached the ends of India. He established a fleet in the Red Sea. He made provinces Armenia, Assyria, and Mesopotamia, which, situated between the Tigris and Euphrates, is made equal to Egypt in fecundity by the flooding rivers."[207]

It appears that Festus had preserved an older tradition that Trajan had crossed the Tigris into Persia, as Dio had stated too. However, he clearly misconstrued the exact locations of the territories he annexed.

Ammianus actually traveled throughout Mesopotamia while serving under the emperor Julian in AD363, and therefore he had first hand knowledge of the region. However, in regard to Assyria his account is clearly totally confused. In fact, he had difficulty even locating Assyria, probably due to the fact that its borders had shifted over time as he recognised. He wrote:

> "Nearest to us of all the provinces is Assyria, famous for its large population, its size, and the abundance and great variety of its products. This province once spread over great and prosperous peoples and districts, then it was combined under a single name, and today the whole region is called Assyria."[208]

In confusion, Ammianus adds that:

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[207] Festus, 20. 2.

[208] Ammianus Marcellinus, 23. 6. 15.

"...within this area is Adiabene, called Assyria in ancient times."[209]

Clearly there was some confusion in Ammianus' mind as to whether Assyria was near to the Roman Empire, or across the Tigris where Adiabene was located, or perhaps both. It is another demonstration that by the fourth century there was much uncertainty over the precise location of Assyria and Trajan's province of Assyria established some two hundred years earlier.

Importantly Eutropius, another fourth century historian, clearly acknowledged that Trajan did in fact campaign well beyond the Tigris. He wrote,

> "He [Trajan] advanced as far as the boundaries of India, and the Red Sea, where he formed three provinces, Armenia, Assyria and Mesopotamia, including the tribes which border on Madena [Media]."[210]

Although this was clearly an exaggerated account, for Trajan did not advance to India, it nonetheless preserves the tradition that Trajan passed through and annexed regions east of the Tigris.

Therefore, the testimonies of the fourth century sources are not certain regarding the matters of Trajan's conquests, nor conditions east of the Tigris with which they were totally unaware. However, they do pass on a tradition, albeit confused, that echoes Cassius Dio's own. Therefore, by taking all the evidence at hand we can determine that: Armenia was annexed as a province, the territory between the Tigris and Euphrates River was the Roman province of Mesopotamia, and that the areas east of the Tigris which had submitted to Trajan, including Adiabene, became the province Assyria.

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[209] Ammianus Marcellinus, 23. 6. 20.

[210] Eutropius, *Abridgement of Roman History*, 8. 3. 2., 6. 2.

Advancing from Babylonia, Trajan entered the Parthian capital Ctesiphon unopposed,[211] was hailed *imperator* and finally felt content enough to adopt the title *Parthicus* voted to him by the Senate, and Roman coins now began featuring 'Parthico' to commemorate Trajan's acceptance of the title.[212] After consolidating his position in the capital, Trajan entered Mesene, otherwise called Characene, and established ties with Athambelus, its ruler.[213] With Trajan's declaration of his three new provinces, the emperor had signaled his hopes of permanent conquests. He quickly executed plans to link his military bases at Nisibis in southern Armenia with Singara in Mesopotamia with a new road, part of which was discovered in the 1920s near Singara together with a milestone that once marked it. Both are dated to this time.[214] It was at this point that the Senate and the citizens prepared for a homecoming triumph and built triumphal arches for their triumphant emperor.[215] No doubt it was then that the triumphal arch erected at Dura-Europos was also built for his army's long march to Rome north along the Euphrates bank.

Needless to say, so far things had boded well for Trajan. However during Trajan's expedition to Characene most of the nations that he had taken control of rebelled. Trajan learned of this once he had returned from the Persian Gulf by Mesene to Babylonia. Promptly, the emperor dispatched Lusius and Maximus to put down the revolts. They had mixed results: Maximus was killed in battle but Lusius fared much better, recapturing Nisibis, and sacking Edessa. Seleucia was also sacked by the lieutenants Erucius Clarus and Julius Alexander. To pacify the locals Trajan decided to remove himself, now an

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[211] Cassius Dio, 68. 28. 1-3.

[212] For examples of such coins see Mattingly, H., (1923) *Roman Imperial Coinage.* Spink. London. *RIC* II, 326, 331, 332. Mattingly, H., (1976) *Coins of the Roman Empire in the British Museum.* British Museum Publications. 2nd Ed. BMCRE 626.

[213] Cassius Dio, 68. 28. 4 - 29. 1.

[214] Stark, F., (1966) *Rome on the Euphrates: The Story of a Frontier.* Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc. New York. p213.

[215] Cassius Dio, 68. 29.

object of displeasure, from the scene, and installed Parthamaspartes as their king and cautiously withdrew. On his march he besieged Hatra to the north which still held out against him without success. Trajan then began his return to Antioch for the winter. It was at this opportune moment that the Parthian armies finally began to make their own presence felt in the area, and attacked Trajan's army repeatedly on its return to Syria. As Fronto stated, the:

> "army, under the leadership even of Trajan, the stoutest of Emperors, [was] by no means unharassed or without loss... as he retired to celebrate his triumph."[216]

Indeed, Trajan's attempt to take Hatra suggests that morale in Trajan's army was at a low, and that Trajan's abilities as a commander-in-chief had come under close scrutiny among his soldiers. One detects from Trajan's soldiers ongoing grievances about insects voiced during the siege as recorded by Dio,[217] that there were emerging deeper frustration with their conditions. As Gilliver points out, the capture of a town or city often served to raise morale among troops and secure loyalty and popularity for a general.[218] But Trajan's siege proved unsuccessful, and Trajan returned to Antioch, where he prepared to recover his conquests the following spring. However, there he became gravely sick, and in Selinus in Cilicia, which he was passing through on his way to Italy, he assigned control of the eastern armies to Hadrian, and died.[219]

This campaign and the rebellions that erupted during it pose glaring questions, not the least of all being: were those rebellions orchestrated to be simultaneous? And if so, who orchestrated them? What is certain is that at the same time Trajan's newly conquered

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[216] Fronto, 'Preamble to History', 7.

[217] Cassius Dio, 31. 4.

[218] Gilliver, C., (1999) p129.

[219] On the issue of the succession of Hadrian after Trajan's death, see Birley, A., (1997) *Hadrian: The Restless Emperor*. Routledge. London. pp77f. See also Bennett, J., (1997) p202f.

kingdoms in Mesopotamia rebelled so too did the Jews in Cyrene, Egypt and Cyprus, and exposed Trajan's drastic weakness in his rear. As a result, although conclusive evidence is lacking, their synchronisation make them appear planned for execution at the same moment. Sheldon and Neusner both argue that these simultaneous rebellions were in fact fomented deliberately by Parthian incitement: Sheldon on the basis of the nature of espionage during this period, and Neusner on Jewish political cohesion.[220]

Faced with widespread rebellion and a Parthian army Trajan had no choice but to withdraw and regroup in Syria. But his death cut short his intention to return. Thus, his war ended in disaster, even if some ties in Characene and Elymais remained. However it did bring about change in a way he had not envisaged. The role the Roman city of Palmyra was to play throughout the region, meant that economic control, rather than military control, was ultimately what submitted it to the will of Palmyra and Rome. Trajan had changed the whole economic geography of the area between the two Rivers, and a new status quo would be established in the region with Palmyra and Rome at its apex. Where Trajan had failed to control and hang onto his three new provinces by use of force, the Palmyrenes throughout the principate of Hadrian would succeed by use of trade.

Hadrian and Parthia

Although there is a sizable amount of modern literature that refers to Hadrian in their narratives, there is a gap in scholarship on the subject of Hadrianic Parthian policy. This section, and the next, aims to bridge that gap, and demonstrate that Hadrian actively pursued Rome's interests in the East like Trajan, but through different means to him. In doing so, reference is made to Birley's *Hadrian: The Restless Emperor* which, through its utilization of literature and archaeology, serves as the most indispensable treatment on Hadrian's life. However, it will become clear that most other treatments on the Roman

[220] Sheldon, R. M., (2010) p141, Neusner, J., (1999) p58ff.

Empire have little to add to our knowledge of Hadrian and Parthia. Even Campbell has struggled at times to state anything about the topic from the Roman side,[221] and Bivar likewise from the Parthian side for this period.[222] In most cases, works such as Lintott's *Imperium Romanum* represent impressions of the nature of Roman imperialism in this period, which are then projected onto Hadrian's period. Drawing upon the building of Hadrian's Wall, Lintott himself has assumed that Hadrian always pursued a purely benign foreign policy in the East.[223] Granted, Hadrian's Wall placed a limit on the Roman Empire in Britain.[224] However, it will be demonstrated that the Roman pursuit of political, economical and imperial claims in the East did not cease under Hadrian. In fact, Hadrian continued to further Roman designs on the region, in a very different method to Trajan, via means of trade. That difference has ultimately led many to presume that the two principes had juxtaposed ends in mind. But, in fact Roman control over commerce along the Euphrates reached an apogee under Hadrian that Rome exploited for a century. Hadrian was able to establish that new status quo with the allegiance of the trading-city Palmyra.

Immediately after Trajan's death Hadrian ordered the evacuation of all Roman forces to the western side of the Euphrates River. Many historians, including Lintott, have argued that this marked an end to Roman conquest and the beginning of a new policy whereby Rome chose to contain its power. Thus, it is supposed, a shift took place from

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[221] For Campbell's self-confessed difficulties in finding material on the topic see Campbell, B., (1993) 'War and Diplomacy: Rome and Parthia, 31BC-AD235', in Rich, J., and Shipley, G., (eds.) *War and Society in the Roman World*. Routledge. London. p236.

[222] In a long chapter on Parthian history Bivar devoted less than a paragraph on the period coinciding with Hadrian's principate in Bivar, A., (1983) 'The Political history of Iran Under the Arsacids', in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol 3 (1), pp92-93.

[223] Lintott, A., (1993) *Imperium Romanum: Politics and Administration*. Routledge. London. p14.

[224] 'Hadrian', *Historia Augusta*, 11. On Hadrian's Wall, see Birley, A., (1997) pp123f.

that of endless expansion towards a mere defensible fortress of civilization.[225] This argument finds support in the famous statement of Aelius Aristides, that "perfect policing" was what made Rome great, rather than pushing "territorial boundaries".[226] However, by taking a choice remark from its context one can run the risk of altering its importance. Certainly, by comparison Hadrian's principate was a very different one indeed to Trajan's more militarily active one. But in the long term there was more of a continuum than is sometimes acknowledged: just as Hadrian's imperial predecessors varied when it came to Roman expansionist policy, so too there were future campaigns against Parthia led by his successors Verus, Septimius Severus and Caracalla. Also, Aelius actually stated that the empire depended heavily upon trade with foreign nations for its own markets to thrive. He wrote:

> "...anyone who wants to behold all these products must either journey through the whole world to see them or else come to this city [Rome]... Clothing from Babylonia and the luxuries from the barbarian lands beyond arrive in much greater volume and more easily than if one had to sail from Naxos or Cynthos to Athens, transporting any of their products."[227]

Granted, the aim of Aelius, in these comments, was not to set out imperial policy, but they are a reflection of the realities of his day. Like many modern historians, Aelius compared the different methods utilised by Trajan and Hadrian, and understandably came to a conclusion that since Hadrian did not use the military in his methods his aims were different to Trajan's. But Rome's claims over the Middle East remained, albeit not through conquest but through trade.

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[225] Lintott, A., (1993) *Imperium Romanum: Politics and Administration.* Routledge. London. p14.

[226] Aelius Aristides, *Letter to Rome*, 29-33. 40.

[227] Aelius Aristides, *Letter to Rome*, 11-13.

Lepper argued that Hadrian had no option but to withdraw his armies from the east in order to address the unrest throughout the Roman Empire.[228] In this he has strong support from the ancient sources. The *Historia Augusta*, states that upon Hadrian's succession the Moors, Britons and Sarmatians were mobilizing for war with Rome, that there was also civil unrest in Egypt, Libya and Palestine, and that Parthamasiris (Trajan's nominee for the Parthian throne) was rejected by the Parthians.[229] Syme proposed that Trajan's preoccupation with his Parthian war in the last years of his life was what gave his opponents throughout the Roman Empire their opportunity to rebel.[230] Birley also points out that Hadrian was faced with political dissent in other forms,[231] citing the *Historia Augusta*, which states that Rome's City Prefect, Baebius Macer, opposed Hadrian's succession, and the exiles Laberius Maximus and Crassus Frugi had designs on the imperial throne as did Lusius Quietus, commander in Judaea, also. To address these concerns not just around the empire but also in Rome, the *Historia* states, Macer and Quietus were replaced, Crassus was executed, and Maximus was kept in check by Hadrian's control over his son in law, Bruttius Praesens, who was governor of Cilicia.[232] In light of such an anarchic state of affairs a Parthian war must have seemed irresponsible to Hadrian, and indeed dangerous to the survival of his principate.

Roman responses to Hadrian's withdrawal are difficult to determine through the literary sources. It was condemned by Fronto who was an intimate and counselor of the imperial family for over thirty years. Furthermore, his written communications have been taken by Champlin as representative of a typical contemporary feeling on various

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[228] Lepper, F., (1948) *Trajan's Parthian War*. Oxford University Press. London. pp212-213.

[229] 'Hadrian', *Historia Augusta*, 4. 10f. Birley, A., (1997) p78f.

[230] Syme, R., (1958) p495.

[231] Birley, A., (1997) p77f.

[232] 'Hadrian', *Historia Augusta*, 4. 10f.

personal and political matters.[233] According to Fronto, Hadrian gave up Trajan's conquests due to his own poor leadership skills; and that Rome could have recovered and held those territories, regardless of political uncertainty throughout the Roman Empire, if only Hadrian had possessed the ability to do so – but he did not Fronto claimed.[234] However, despite Fronto's eminent position, due care is required, for his comments were written in a preamble to his history of Verus' own Parthian War, a venture Fronto was keen to wax lyrical on. That the war was juxtaposed to Hadrian's own policies naturally meant that Fronto found it expedient to highlight Verus' policies over Hadrian's. Fronto's bias and ulterior motives, therefore, must be taken into account.

Identifying Roman views on Hadrian's foreign policy within other literary sources is also problematic. Some modern historians identify hostility towards Hadrian's foreign policy within other circles as well associated with Tacitus, Suetonius and Plutarch. Syme, in *Tacitus*, as well as Birley, have both argued that the statement made by Tacitus, that Tiberius had no interest in extending the empire, was actually a criticism of Hadrian's own foreign policy.[235] According to Syme, Tacitus' comment that the Roman Empire in his day reached the Red Sea is actually a reference to the Persian Gulf, meaning that he was writing sometime during Hadrian's reign.[236] There is some merit to this argument, for it has been shown by Gawlikowski that Characene, situated by the Persian Gulf, acted as a client kingdom under Rome's influence from the time of Hadrian's reign to the reign of Septimius Severus, when Vologases V (reigned 191-207/8) retook it for Parthia.[237] Characene offered its allegiance to Rome only in the last year of Trajan's life, and

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[233] Champlin, F., (1980) *Fronto and Antonine Rome*. Harvard University Press. pp2, 29, 44, 95.

[234] Fronto, 'Preamble to History', 10.

[235] Tacitus, *Annals*, 4. 32.. On Tacitus' references to Hadrian in his account of Tiberius' reign see Syme, R., (1958) p490-498, and Birley, A., (1997) *Hadrian: The Restless Emperor*. Routledge. London. pp104, 116.

[236] Syme, R., (1958) pp470-471.

[237] Gawlikowski, M. (1994) p29.

remained under Rome's influence for almost a century thereafter. As a result, if Tacitus had referred to the Persian Gulf as an extremity of the Roman Empire, logically Tacitus must have written the *Annals* after Trajan's death. However, since then has Goodyear contested his argument,[238] and Syme himself later discarded it arguing that since the overall picture of Tiberius in the *Annals* is the same as those in Suetonius' biography and Cassius Dio's narrative it must a true account of the Julio-Claudians.[239]

There are also other aspects of Syme's original hypothesis which require addressing. Firstly, there is the designation of Tacitus' Red Sea with the Persian Gulf. Since Syme's *Tacitus* was published epigraphic evidence has been discovered in the Roman province of Arabia which shows that since its annexation in 106 the province extended considerably along the Saudi Arabian side of the Red Sea.[240] Consequently, Bowersock raises the possibility that the *Annals* were written not long after 106.[241] However, it is Tacitus' own words that imply that he was referring to Rome's control over the Red Sea as we know it today rather than the Persian Gulf. To quote Tacitus:

> "He [Germanicus] came to Elephantine and Syene, once the frontier posts of the Roman Empire, which now, however, extends to the Red Sea."[242]

To determine Tacitus' intended meaning one must consider that Tacitus might have compared Elephantine and Syene with the extent of the empire in his own day because they are directly related. If Tacitus intended to indicate the Persian Gulf as the empire's extent in his own day, then surely it follows that his references to Elephantine and Syene

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[238] Goodyear, F., (1972) *The Annals of Tacitus*, 1. Cambridge. pp127-8, 183-4.

[239] Syme, R., (1974) 'History or Biography: The Case of Tiberius Caesar', in *Historia: Zeitschrift fur Alte Geschichte*, Vol 23, No 4, (4th Quarter) p482.

[240] Bowersock, G., (1993) *Tacitus and the Tacitean Tradition.* Princeton University Press. p5.

[241] Bowersock, G., (1993) pp5, 10.

[242] Tacitus, *Annals*, 2. 67f.

seem unrelated. Reference to the Roman Empire's frontiers in the upper extremities of the Euphrates during Germanicus' visit to Syria and Armenia would have been more in keeping for comparison with the Persian Gulf where it discharges. However, if Tacitus intended to indicate the Red Sea as we know it then such irrelevance vanishes. Thus, Tacitus was pointing out to readers that where once the empire extended to Elephantine and Syene on Egypt's Nile, in his day it extended comparably to Egypt's Red Sea coast. As a result, Syme was right to discard his original argument, and that Tacitus is not a source of commentary on Hadrian's reign.

The second assumption in Syme's *Tacitus* that needs addressing is that there exist references to Hadrian's principate in the *Annals*. In fact there are no explicit statements by Tacitus about Hadrian, and as a result, Sailor raises the point that when Tacitus criticizes his subject he could actually have been criticizing Trajan's rule, or any other princeps for that matter.[243] It could even be argued that in Tacitus' criticisms of Tiberius' disinterest in expanding the Roman Empire,[244] Tacitus was in fact contrasting that principate with the military glories of his and his audience's own day during Trajan's reign, when he probably wrote the *Annals*. Consequently, assumptions that Tacitus can read as a source on Hadrian should be handled tentatively.

Suetonius as a source of political dissent regarding Hadrian's eastern policy is equally hard to establish. Granted, he was sacked from his position as secretary to Hadrian in 122, a fact that has led Birley and Wallace-Hadrill to entertain whether that inspired in him a desire to write negatively about various emperors after his dismissal.[245] However, this does not account for Suetonius' positive accounts of the lives of Vespasian and Titus, nor the fact that nowhere does Suetonius ever openly criticize Hadrian in his *Lives*. In fact, the similarities between Suetonius' portrayal of Tiberius to Tacitus', if anything

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[243] Sailor, D., (2008) *Writing and Empire in Tacitus*. Cambridge University Press. p256.

[244] Tacitus, *Annals*, 4. 32.

[245] Birley, A., (1997) p5. Wallace-Hadrill, A., (1983) *Suetonius: The Scholar and his Caesars*. Duckworth. London. p62.

shows that like Tacitus, Suetonius' criticisms of Tiberius were aimed solely at that particular emperor.

There is also no criticism of Hadrian's foreign policy in Plutarch's *Parallel Lives* which were written between the mid-90s to Plutarch's death in c.120. Of course, in his biographies there is dramatic Parthian despondency over Sulla's prestige in diplomatic meetings with Parthian ambassadors,[246] an assertion that Pompey and Rome can fit their border in the East wherever they please,[247] Caesar's unfinished business of conquering Parthia at hand,[248] and of course Antony's glorious victories despite huge losses in manpower against the Parthians in battle after battle.[249] Such details may reflect an inherent contempt for Parthia on Plutarch's part. However it does not result that Plutarch, a native of Chaeronea who became a Roman citizen, who sought to affect his readership more profoundly than Suetonius:[250] and to nurture admirable character traits in his subjects[251] sought to condition his audience for war. Rather, by Plutarch's own admission in his *Pericles* and *Demetrius*, his intention in writing his biographies was to foster virtue.[252] In his *Life of Alexander*, Plutarch also added that he chose to achieve that at the cost of all other considerations including military, political issues and historical accuracy.[253] Since Plutarch saw little virtue in Crassus' and Antony's Parthian wars, it is

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[246] Plutarch, *Sulla*, 5.

[247] Plutarch, *Pompey,* 33.

[248] Plutarch, *Caesar*, 58.

[249] Plutarch, *Marc Antony*, 43-50.

[250] Konstan, D., (2009) 'Reading Politics in Suetonius', in Dominik, W., Garthewaite, J., and Roche, P., (eds.) op cit., pp458, 459.

[251] Lamberton, R., (2001) *Plutarch.* Yale University Press. London. p72. Stadter, A., (2000) 'The Rhetoric of Virtue in Plutarch's Lives', in Stockt, L., (ed.) *Collection D'Etudes Classiques: Rhetorical Theory and Praxis in Plutarch.* Peeters. Louvain. pp493-501.

[252] Plutarch, *Pericles*, 1., *Demetrius*, 1.

[253] Plutarch, *Alexander*, 1.

unlikely that he wished others to emulate them. As a result, Plutarch's references to Parthia in his lives of Sulla, Pompey, Crassus, Caesar and Antony, were not designed to instill a spirit for war with Parthia, but to make points about his subjects' virtues.

Nonetheless, whilst it is difficult to determine what responses there were among Hadrian's literary contemporaries at the time of the withdrawal, there is evidence that the armies found it favourable. Even Fronto recognized that Hadrian was popular with the armies.[254] This sentiment is also echoed in the *Historia Augusta* which states that Hadrian was greatly loved by the Roman armies on account of the careful attention he showed them.[255] Such popularity might have had its beginnings with the withdrawal. As a new emperor in an unstable empire, Hadrian, knew exactly who to curry favour with: the armies. Lepper has argued that Hadrian ensured this favour by circulating an official statement, made by Hadrian and taken up throughout Dio's narrative, that Trajan acted on selfish ambition when he invaded Parthia without any consideration for the empire or the army's state, and it was this, not the efforts of the soldiers, which resulted in the invasion's failure.[256] If correct, by issuing such a statement Hadrian was signaling that, unlike his predecessor, he had the armies' best interests in mind in calculating his imperial policy. Thus, Hadrian was probably addressing the armies' own deep concerns for the feasibility of the Parthian war in light of conditions around the Roman Empire in the withdrawal, and in doing so secured the support he desperately needed to stabilize the empire and ensure his principate.

By appealing to the Roman armies Hadrian demonstrated that he was a consummate politician, and that was to be repeatedly proven that for the duration of his long principate. Throughout his dealings with Parthia Hadrian exhibited diplomatic skills that successfully contained any possibility of a Parthian military threat. Not only did he forge

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[254] Fronto, 'Preamble to History', 10.

[255] 'Hadrian', *Historia Augusta*, 21.

[256] Lepper, F., (1948) p204.

a tie of friendship with Parthia itself,[257] thus saving his empire from invasion, he also forged ties of friendship and alliance with Parthia's peripheral neighbours: the Armenians, Edessa and Oshroene to the west of the Parthian Empire, the Alani, Iberians, and Hyrcanians to the north, and the Bactrians in the east.[258] As Domitian had done before him,[259] but on a grander scale, Hadrian ensured that Parthia was covered on every side in case of war. While the *Historia Augusta* dismisses such alliances as hollow tokens arising from Hadrian's dispersions of money and gifts,[260] such a dismissal ignores that alliances were valuable tools to a princeps. The example of Vespasian's effective use of the Alani demonstrates that Rome's allies could be faithfully called upon to support a Roman cause. Thus, Hadrian returned to the Flavian policy of keeping allies surrounding Parthia in reserve should the need arise, and make use of them tactically against Parthia through their ties of their alliances.[261]

Hadrian's policy had its limitations, for Hadrian had no allies between the northern Euphrates and Characene to exploit to reconquer the region. However, that is not a signal of a cessation of Rome's expansionist interests there. In fact, Hadrian could, and did, use his diplomatic skills to interfere in Parthian political issues: in128/9 he even made overtures to Osroes, a contender for Vologases III's throne.[262] But Hadrian knew not to overstretch his resources and manpower. He had seen firsthand the failure of Trajan's war and the repercussions for his empire, and therefore he chose to consolidate rather than endanger it. Instead, Hadrian pursued a different course, but one still aimed at expanding Rome's interests in the East; one that involved economic exploitation rather that military action.

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[257] 'Hadrian', *Historia Augusta*, 13, 21.

[258] 'Hadrian', *Historia Augusta*, 17, 21.

[259] Jones, B., (1992) pp155-157.

[260] 'Hadrian', *Historia Augusta*, 17, 21.

[261] Whittaker, C., (2000) p310.

[262] Bivar, A., (1983) p93.

As a result, the differences in the short term between the imperialist aims Trajan and Hadrian were less dramatic as is sometimes assumed. Roman intentions to control those outside the empire persisted, only the methods employed to bring about that control changed. In fact, Hadrian's aim was always to manipulate the political situation of the nations beyond the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers. That policy was to persist among Roman Emperors for a century. Hadrian's principate, therefore, although a clear shift in method from Trajan's own, was not as clear a break with what had gone before it as some have supposed.

In fact, as will be demonstrated in the next section, Rome continued its claims over the East, fostering commerce with Characene and the Persian Gulf. Characene's service to Rome would prove an indication of the loyalty Rome's allies east of the Euphrates could provide Hadrian, and the strength of Hadrian's foreign policy. Even despite the threat of reprisal from an empire as great as Parthia's, such loyalty remained strong. As an observer Hadrian was not blind to that fact, but as a commander under Trajan, and later as a new emperor, he had also recognized that the allegiances of subjects, both new and old, extended only so far. Within Hadrian's foreign policy these issues were addressed with resounding success.

Palmyra and East-West Trade

The relatively stable principate of Hadrian facilitated trade between the Roman and Parthian Empires. But the face of the economy in the Middle East had changed permanently and dramatically. The local hubs between the Tigris and Euphrates that once facilitated East-West trade, such as Characene, had declined somewhat: although trade clearly continued,[263] coinage from the region in this period is scarce.[264] In reply, from

[263] Potts, D., (1988) 'Arabia and the Kingdom of Characene', in *Araby the Blest, Copenhagen, Carsten Niebuhr Institute Publications 7*, pp137-167.

[264] Wenke, R., (1981) p306.

that point on the Roman city Palmyra took in hand the opportunity to exploit regional trade, replacing Characene and other former trading centers as middleman.

According to Josephus Palmyra was founded by king Solomon for its springs as well its central location between Upper Syria to the west and the Euphrates River and Babylonia to the east,[265] making it a suitable stopover for caravan merchants traveling to and from those regions. Yet if its existence appealed to traders traversing the surrounding deserts, it also allowed its inhabitants to conceptualise their closest neighbours as being foreigners from far and wide and the nations they came from. Thus from its very foundation, Palmyra was a city isolated but with global aspirations. Consequently, Pliny the Elder recognised by the mid-first century AD that Palmyra's location between the Roman and Parthian Empires would determine a prosperous and far-reaching future.[266]

Palmyra had been a wealthy trading city in inland Syria for almost a century before it came under Roman control during the early 1st century AD. According to Appian, by the time Antony plundered Palmyra at the start of his war with Parthia, the city had already been trading with Rome and Parthia for some time:[267] Seyrig has argued that Palmyra's contact with Parthia started in the aftermath of Crassus' calamitous defeat in 53BC, whereupon Parthia began developing trade with Syria.[268] It has been argued that Palmyra came under direct Roman control during the visit to the East by Germanicus on two

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[265] Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, 8. 6. 1. On Palmyra generally, see Seyrig, H., (1950) 'Palmyra and the East', in *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol 40., Richmond, I., (1963) 'Palmyra Under the Aegis of Rome', in *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol 53., Matthews, J., (1984) 'The Tax Law of Palmyra: Evidence for Economic History in a City of the Roman East', in *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol 74., and see especially Edwell, P., (2008) *Between Rome and Persia: The Middle Euphrates, Mesopotamia and Palmyra Under Roman Control*. Routledge. London.

[266] Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 5. 88.

[267] Appian, *Civil War*, 5. 9.

[268] Seyrig, H., (1950) p1.

counts: firstly, three statues discovered there by archaeologists were dedicated to Tiberius, Drusus and Germanicus,[269] and secondly, Germanicus' edicts are contained in the tax law of Palmyra in 137 as legal precedent.[270]

Directly following Germanicus' visit, Rome began investing heavily into Palmyra's mercantile development, and the result was that Palmyra's economic prosperity boomed exponentially.[271] Monumental buildings were erected: the Temple of Bel was dedicated in Palmyra in 32AD.[272] The construction of the temple bares influences from a range of cultures, with Hellenistic sculptures, terracottas from Mesopotamia, and a mixture of Oriental and Roman architecture.[273] As a further sign of Rome's overlordship and Palmyrene voluntary acceptance and embrace of it, the Semitic god Bel was also worshipped in Palmyra's Temple of Rome.[274] As for the population of Palmyra, even if the modern estimate of 150,000 to 200,000 inhabitants[275] is too optimistic, it is nonetheless a reflection of its wealth and importance.

However, it was under Hadrian that Palmyrene fortunes really launched. Of the 2832 inscriptions discovered at Palmyra, about 180 are honourific[276] and one in six of these

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[269] Richmond, I., (1963) p44.

[270] Matthews, J., (1984) p161. See also page 164 for Palmyrene economic boom coinciding with Roman investment in Palmyra.

[271] Richmond, I., (1963) p44. Browning, I., (1979) *Palmyra*. Chatto and Windus. London. p25.

[272] Drijvers, H., (1976) *The Religion of Palmyra*. E. J. Brill. Leiden. p9.

[273] Drijvers, H., (1976) p9.

[274] Teixidor, J., (1979) *The Pantheon of Palmyra*. E. J. Brill. Leiden. p10.

[275] Crouch, D., (1972) 'A Note on the Population and Area of Palmyra', in *Melanges de l'Universite Saint Joseph*, Vol 47, pp241-250. Admittedly, Matthews states that Crouch's methods are speculative, but he adds that his results are plausible.

[276] For descriptions and a discussion of inscriptions at Palmyra, see Gardner, I., Lieu, S., Parry, K., (2005) *From Palmyra to Zayton: Epigraphy and Iconography*. Brepolis.

were etched by Palmyrene merchants in honour of various trading benefactors and assistants.[277] They indicate that between 130-161AD Palmyrene merchants were constantly active as traders between Syria and Parthia. The inscriptions, written in Greek and Palmyrene, describe with pride the trans-Euphrates trading ventures and those further afield by Palmyrenes: seventeen inscriptions mention trade with Characene, nine mention trade with Vologasias, two with India, one with Seleucia, and one with Babylon.[278]

Although much about the lives of those involved in the trading life of Palmyra has been lost, the inscriptions do leave behind some valuable information about the types of roles they played. One particularly famous character was Soades, son of Boliades. The first inscription to mention his name occurs in the year 132, in which he was honoured for assisting and defending caravans from bandits traveling to and from Vologasias to the point of even not sparing his own life.[279] In 144 another inscription honours him again for taking a force of Palmyrenes, no doubt so that his life would be in less danger than what it was in 132, and using them to defend more caravans traveling to and from Vologasias.[280] For such bravery Soades was awarded commendations, both by Hadrian and later Antoninus Pius, and was honoured by decrees and statues in Vologasias, Spasinou Charax, and Gennaes in 145.[281] There were others too who braved the dangers

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Ancient History Documentary Research Centre, Macquarie University, Sydney. pp1-126. On the honourific inscriptions at Palmyra, see Gianto, A., (2005) 'Variation in the Palmyrene Honorific Inscriptions', in Cussini, E., (ed.) *A Journey to Palmyra: Collected Essays to Remember Delbert R. Hillers*. Brill. Boston. pp74-88.

[277] For an overview of publications of these particular inscriptions, see Matthews, J., (1984) pp157-158. For a recent, thorough, description and discussion of these 34 inscriptions, see Gawlikowski, M., (1994) 'Palmyra as a Trading Centre', in *Iraq*, Vol 56, pp28-33.

[278] Gawlikowski, M., (1994) pp32-33.

[279] *PAT* 0197.

[280] *JSS* S4 pp34-36. See Gardner, I., et al, (2005) pp106-107.

[281] *PAT* 1062.

of travel and assisted the passing caravans. Marcus Ulpius Iaraeus was notable. In 155 he was honoured with an inscription in Palmyra by the caravans traveling there from Spasinou Charax,[282] and two years later he received further honours from the Characenes once again.[283] Amazingly, in 157 he was honoured for his bravery for helping merchants to and from the Indus region.[284] Other Palmyrenes such as Julius Maximus, a soldier, and one Iariboles, son of Lisamsos, were also honoured with inscriptions in the city, in 135 and 138 respectively.[285]

Inscriptions from Palmyra also tell us that its citizens were not the only ones responsible for defending caravans. One such inscription honours one NN, son of NN, son of Alexander, a Characene, and records that he was honoured not only there but also in Spasinou Charax and Vologasias for his mercenary services.[286] In fact Palmyra had such close relations with their wider world that many Palmyrenes would become very influential politically. They show that in 131, for instance, one Iarhai Nebouzabados, became satrap of Thilouana, in modern Bahrain,[287] while Iariboles, son of Lisamsos, who we have already mentioned (See above) was even sent as an ambassador of Spasinou Charax, located in Characene, to Orodes, king of Elymais.[288] Astonishingly, by 142 Palmyrenes had assumed such a privileged place along the Euphrates trading leg, that they even dedicated a temple to the Augusti in Vologasias itself.[289]

As Palmyrenes operated in this manner, Rome closely monitored the unfolding events. Hence, several Palmyrenes were even rewarded by Roman emperors for their conduct.

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[282] *PAT* 0274.

[283] *PAT* 1411.

[284] *PAT* 2763.

[285] See Julius Maximus: *PAT* 1395. Iariboles: *PAT* 1414.

[286] *PAT* 1412.

[287] *PAT* 1374.

[288] *PAT* 1414.

[289] Matthews, J., (1984) p166.

We have already observed the commendations for Soades, son of Boliades, for assisting traders in Vologasias, received testimonial letters from both Hadrian, and later Antoninus Pius.[290] They were not to be the only honours emperors paid to Palmyra. Hadrian himself visited the city:[291] an inscription dated to 131 honours the visit of "the god Hadrianus" to Palmyra.[292] Although Hadrian's itinerary in Palmyra has not survived, this inscription does record that while in Palmyra, Hadrian conferred with "both foreigners and citizens." Given this fact and also that his visit coincided with the beginnings of the city's global commercial expansion as reflected in the inscriptions discussed above, we can however determine his agenda: to establish Palmyra's economic leadership capabilities with respect to foreign trade, and begin to bolster the city for the large-scale trade that quickly followed Hadrian's visit there. The Palmyrenes were happy to oblige too. As Edwell has found, the growing demand in Rome for luxury goods from the East ensured that Palmyrene traders would reap large profits so long as the caravans kept on coming, and that in turn meant that the protection of those caravans continued to be of fundamental importance to Palmyra.[293]

As further testament to the power and influence that Palmyrenes wielded in the region, a Palmyrene tomb has even been discovered on Kharg Island in the Persian Gulf.[294] Also, the additional frequent discoveries made by archaeologists of both Roman glassworks and Mesopotamian glazed ware all around the Persian Gulf has led Tomber to suggest that Palmyrene merchants were actively trading right throughout it.[295] But if foreign economic incursions into the Persian Gulf were unheard of in the first century, when trade around it was dominated by Parthia, it was a new phenomenon for Rome too.

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[290] Matthews, J., (1984) p166.

[291] 'Hadrian', *Historia Augusta*, 13. 10f. Birley, A., (1997) pp230f.

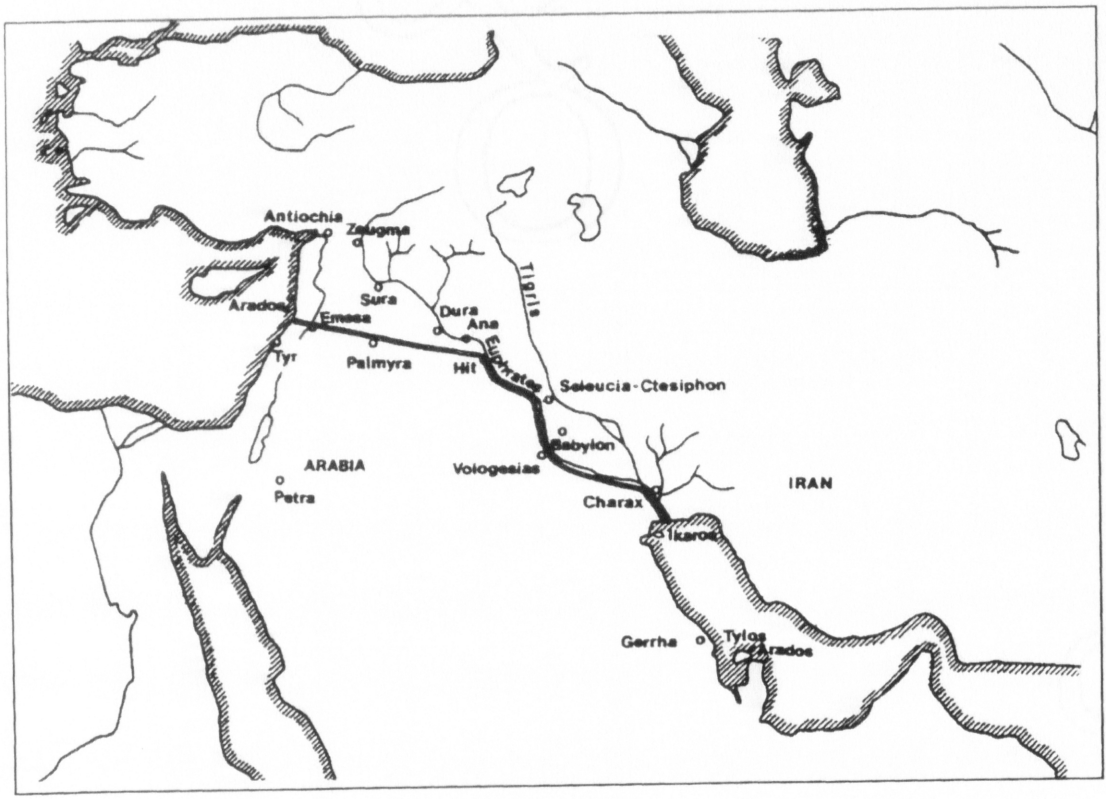
[292] *PAT* 0305=C 3959, Gardner, I., et al., (2005) p76. On Hadrian's visit to Palmyra in general, see Edwell, P., (2008) p46f.

[293] Edwell, P., (2008) pp32, 33 202.

[294] Matthews, J., (1984) p166.

[295] Tomber, R., (2008) pp105, 115.

Throughout the previous century trade with the Far East was accessed by Romans only via the Red Sea, as Strabo observed.[296] However, Palmyrene accomplishments extended well beyond what their Roman sponsors imagined their Palmyrene subjects capable of.



Palmyrene trade route to the Gulf. Source: Ball, W., (2000) *Rome in the East*. Routledge. London. p75.

As further reflection on Palmyra's global standing, Chinese silk fabrics were discovered by archaeologists in two Palmyrene tombs in Palmyra in 1933, and their manufacture has been dated to sometime between the late 1st century AD and the late 3rd century.[297] Needless to say, one should not read too much politically into these

[296] Strabo, 17. 1. 13. See also Greene, K., (1986) *The Archaeology of the Roman Economy*. B. T. Batsford Ltd. London. p29.

[297] Maenchen-Helfen, O., (1943) 'From China to Palmyra', in *The Art Bulletin*, Vol 25, No 4 (December) p358.

discoveries. There were not separate and conflicting 'official' policies and opposing 'underground' movements for or against Rome and Parthia as such, for as the archaeology suggests, in Palmyra the influences of many cultures existed side by side. Rather, Palmyra's inhabitants were in the fortunate position to enjoy the advantages of being positioned by the Silk Route trade, and the goods and cultural symbols traders from abroad had to offer in their city. Palmyrenes simply favoured certain culturally appropriate aspects of foreign peoples over others in various contexts according to Palmyrene tastes. Yet they did retain much of their own cultural character as well. As Woolf comments, what 'Romanisation' there was that existed on the empire's frontiers, was adopted and adapted by locals freely, who in turn added their own customs and ways of dealing with the socio-political milieu that was the Roman Empire.[298]

Palmyra was able to maintain its ascendancy due to the fact that the Elymean and Characene merchants no longer continued in their roles as Romano-Parthian trade middlemen after Trajan's invasions.[299] That might have been the result not only of Trajan's onslaught itself, for Characene and Elymais were not conquered but entered into alliance with him. Rather, there may have been an emerging unwillingness among such merchants to restore the regional trade to Parthia's control - Parthia had evacuated its army from the region during Trajan's invasion after all. In any case, the new commercial status quo was established with Palmyra at its centre, and Characene and Elymais, now allies of Palmyra and Rome, appear to have embraced it.

With Palmyrene success, so too did Rome benefit, and soon there existed an understanding of cooperation between Rome and Palmyra to control trade over Mesopotamian commerce and maritime trade between the Persian Gulf and the Far East. In 2008 Tomber analyzed ancient amphorae discovered throughout India's coastlines,

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[298] Woolf, G., (1992) 'Imperialism, Empire and the Integration of the Roman Economy', in *World Archaeology*, Vol 23, No 3 (February) p290. Woolf, G., (1997) 'Beyond Romans and Natives', in *World Archaeology*, Vol 28, No 3 (February) p347.

[299] Wenke, R., (1981) pp306, 310.

which were used to transport Roman liquids like oil, fish sauce and wine there by sea. She found that half of them were lined with bitumen, and has argued that they were likely to have been made in Mesopotamia since bitumen is a famous, if not entirely exclusive, Mesopotamian resource.[300] If Tomber is correct, then it may be that Mesopotamian manufacturers themselves were being employed by Romano-Palmyrenes, thus providing us with a further indication that the level of economic power Palmyra, and thus Rome, had in the Near East was considerable during this period.

Therefore, Trajan's invasion had not secured for Rome direct control over Mesopotamia, but Hadrian was able to reap handsome profits through commerce and taxation, particularly from Palmyra. The city was so wealthy in fact that it was able to exact civic taxes alongside Rome's.[301] In 137 the Palmyrene Boule increased regulation regarding traded goods passing through their city: whereas there had previously been some confusion over taxation among tax-collectors and merchants, now written contracts between the two groups ensured that the right amount was taxed.[302] That suited merchants, who were keen not to be taken for granted. But it also added to the legal security of Palmyra's civic tax-collectors. In turn, the treasurers of Rome took their cut. An inscription from 161 in Palmyra honours the Roman tax-collector Marcus Aemilius Marcianus Asclepiades who was based in Antioch.[303] Thus Trajan was not to attain the Euphrates' riches - that was left to the Palmyrene traders and Roman tax-collectors that followed him after his death. The Palmyrene's cultural and geographical conditioning was such that it drove them to embrace trade and long-distance commerce. Stimulated by Rome's own enthusiasm to invest monetarily in the merits of that conditioning for a

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[300] See Tomber, R., (2008) p39f for a full discussion of her findings. For an ancient account of sources of bitumen, see Pliny the Elder, *Natural History*, 35. 178-180.

[301] Browning, I., (1979) p26.

[302] *PAT* 0259 lines 7-10. Gardner, I., Lieu, S., Parry, K., (2005) pp36-38.

[303] *PAT* 1373. Butcher, K., (2003) *Roman Syria and the Near East*. British Museum Press. London. pp191-194.

lucrative return, it was this which inevitably brought that conditioning to realization and fruition.

As a result of this discussion, it is clear that the assumption that Hadrian pursued a benign defensive policy throughout the whole breadth of the Roman Empire does not truly reflect the complexities of his principate and especially his policy in the east. Granted, there exists Hadrian's Wall. However, Britain was far removed from the Euphrates River which remained a highway of trade, activity and human movement. Instead of drawing a border for the empire, beyond which Rome's power stalled, Hadrian should rather be seen as seeking to maintain a policy of containing Parthia, and trying to secure the riches of the trans-Euphrates commercial for Rome through the efforts of the inhabitants of Palmyra. Understandably, Romans like Aelius Aristides could see the numerous products arriving from the East but no outward signs of military imperialism during Hadrian's time as emperor. But Hadrian had not discarded Rome's imperialist claims altogether. In fact, he embraced them. Of course, amidst the unstable Roman Empire Hadrian could not risk another war with Parthia. Consequently Hadrian could only exploit to some effect Rome's alliances and Palmyra's potential to serve Rome's economical interests. In doing so, Hadrian did clearly break with his imperial predecessors. Granted, others before him had acknowledged Palmyra's wealth and ability to trade, but it was he who made it into the commercial power and tool it became under his principate.

THE ANTONINES

Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus

On Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, Birley's *Marcus Aurelius* is an in depth survey of the available literary and archaeological sources and was thus used to research this period. It contains a detailed account of the Verus' war with Parthia and its conclusions are essential to this thesis. However, it almost stands alone as a serious treatment of the issue of the Antonines and Parthia: Sheldon's *Rome's Wars in Parthia* offers an overview of Verus' invasions, but since it follows the *Historia Augusta* and its adverse view of Verus some caution must be observed. This section and the next aim to bridge that gap, and in doing so reestablish Verus' character, his suitability for commanding the war against Parthia, and the implications of his choice as commander with regard to Romano-Parthian relations and trade in the immediate and longer terms. To do this we are required to synthesise scholarship. However, given that scholarship as yet does not cover all aspects of Verus' war, careful treatment of the ancient sources is critical for a thorough understanding of this period. Available to modern historians are the writings of Dio and Fronto, as well as the *Historia Augusta* and each provides us with certain insights worthy of investigation, albeit if at times they tell us more about the historical contexts of its writers themselves rather than the actual war.

Our main source of information on Antoninus Pius, the *Historia Augusta*, states that Hadrian's successor's eastern foreign policy was much the same as his own. Pius was determined to confine Parthia's imperialist capabilities, and by ensuring the goodwill of Armenia as well as Pontic and other eastern kingdoms,[304] the princeps was able to keep in check Parthian expansionist aspirations against Rome's eastern frontiers. However, Rome's eastern policy of containment was a source of resentment in Parthia, which still held out hopes to reassert its control over Armenia. Affront to Parthia may also have resulted from Palmyra's growing intervention throughout several of Parthia's own former trade arteries along the Euphrates, and throughout the Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean. Consequently, Vologases IV prepared for war with Rome.[305] To neutralize the threat posed by Parthia's peripheral neighbours who were still allied to Rome, Vologases calculated that the best timing to launch the war would be upon the approaching death of Antoninus. Perhaps he had hoped that during that time there would be enough instability throughout the Roman Empire for Parthia's neighbours to discard their alliances with Rome and support Parthia instead.

According to Dio, upon Antoninus Pius' death in 161AD the king of Parthia, Vologases IV, ordered the annihilation of a Roman legion in Armenia, and then installed his own candidate Wa'el on the throne there, and invaded Syria. Once again Armenia had reemerged as a disputed issue and one that neither Rome nor Parthia sought to relinquish. This breakdown in relations over Armenia is further sign of the failure of Trajan's Parthian war as well as the limited successes of Rome's containment methods. In response the new emperor, Marcus Aurelius, immediately declared war and ordered his brother, Lucius Verus, who was also his co-emperor, to invade Parthia.[306]

Although it is often accepted on the basis of the *Historia Augusta* that Verus was unsuited to take up a major military command, it will be demonstrated in this section that

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[304] 'Antoninus Pius', *Historia Augusta*, 9. 6f.

[305] 'Antoninus Pius', *Historia Augusta*, 7. 10f.

[306] Cassius Dio, 71. 2. 1.

Marcus Aurelius' choice to send his brother east at the head of an army was astute and warranted. In fact, the choice of Verus to take command was a shrewd decision on Marcus' part. Granted, the *Historia Augusta* portrays Verus as a lover of luxury and totally inept at matters to do with warfare, but other literary sources suggest that that was actually not the case. As for the *HA* biography, it states that during his whole time in the East while the war raged, Verus indulged himself in Antioch and Daphne, leaving his army with all the necessary fighting:

> "Verus, of course, after he arrived in Syria, lived in luxury at Antioch and Daphne, although he was acclaimed *imperator* while waging the Parthian war through his legates."[307]

In light of these comments Sheldon has argued that Verus' legates, who indeed proved to be gifted and talented, were dispatched by the emperor Marcus as a counter-weight for his brother's lack of such qualities.[308]

However, other sources actually paint a very different picture about Verus' capacity as a commander. Dio described him as a vigorous man well suited to military enterprises. It was for that specific reason, Dio stated, Marcus chose him to conduct the war against the Parthians.[309] Fronto's writings also support Dio's statement. In 163AD, Fronto wrote a letter to Verus praising his one time student's obvious warlike qualities and military abilities,[310] a sentiment echoed in his preamble to his history of Verus' war with Parthia.[311] Although Syme has argued that Fronto deliberately exaggerated Verus' character in the preamble solely to tarnish Trajan's own,[312] he did not take into account

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[307] 'Marcus Aurelius' *Historia Augusta*, 9.

[308] Sheldon, R., (2010) p156.

[309] Cassius Dio, 71. 3.

[310] Fronto, *Ad Verum Imp.* 2. 1.

[311] Fronto, 'Preamble to History', 13f.

[312] Syme, R., (1979) *Roman Papers*. Clarendon Press. Oxford. Vol 3, p1436.

Fronto's praises for Verus in private correspondence, nor the glaring probability that Fronto tarnished Trajan rather than overestimated Verus in the preamble. As a result, the Fronto's praises for Verus were generally sincere. In any event, the reliability of the *HA* as a historical source is notoriously questionable in sections.[313]

But if the *HA* reflects nothing on Verus' suitability to command, it is also inadequate in his conduct of the Parthian war as well. Birley has argued that the negative portrayal of Verus' character was intentionally spiteful.[314] That may be, since it has been shown that the writer of the *HA* intentionally contrasted the biographies of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus as opposite moral and immoral exemplars for dramatic effect.[315] However, the *HA*'s author can once again be partly excused for using literary license as he was drawing upon a popular portrayal of Verus current in the late fourth century: Eutropius, too, claimed that Verus was a creature of his passions.[316] But however that may be, the *HA* went much further than Eutropius in condemning him. Eutropius, for one, commended Verus on never acting on his passions,[317] while the *HA* certainly claimed that he did. Birley's case, therefore, is justified.

The *HA*'s portrayal of Verus' character is wholly inaccurate too on Verus' conduct of the war. According to Fronto, Verus took the undisciplined Syrian army, unused for full-scale war since 117AD, and brought them up to strength through strict training. Before

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[313] On the reliability of the *Historia Augusta* as an historical source, see Birley, A., (1966) *Marcus Aurelius*. Eyre and Spottiswoode. London. pp19-20. Syme, R., (1983) *Historia Augusta Papers*. Clarendon Press. Oxford. pp12f.

[314] Birley, A., (1966) p166.

[315] Barta, G., (1971) 'Lucius Verus and the Marcomannic Wars', *Acta Class. Univ. Sc. Dedrecen*. Vol 7, pp67-71. On the *HA* Life of Verus see section 2. 1. c. Stanton, G., (1975) 'Marcus Aurelius, Lucius Verus, and Commodus: 1962-1972', in *Aufstieg Und Niedergang Der Romischen Welt*. Walter de Gruyter. Berlin. Vol 2, Part 2, pp539-540.

[316] Eutropius, 8. 10.

[317] Eutropius, 8. 9-10.

then, Fronto added, it was mutinous, disobedient, and often inebriated.[318] Indeed, Fronto wrote, it was actually Verus himself who took the army in hand and restored it to a level of discipline needed for a prolonged war against the Parthians: with forced marches, exposure to the natural elements, and much encouragement.[319] But Verus was not just a strict disciplinarian - he showed clemency and sympathy for his soldiers when they deserved it, and provided the necessary logistical and medical treatment where needed from his bases in Syria throughout the whole war's duration.[320] Although Fronto might be accused of bias given his station among the imperial family, he also had numerous witnesses among the soldiers who could verify his testimony.

As a result, Verus' appointment was not a poor choice on Marcus Aurelius' part at all. Indeed, as Fronto and Dio reveal, Verus was a suitable leader to conduct a large-scale war. The danger in the East was certainly great enough to warrant the appointment of a member of the imperial family:[321] according to Dio, after the Parthians had invaded Syria which, since it contained many wealthy cities including Palmyra, was invaluable to the Roman treasury.[322] Such a threat had to be accommodated with the best leadership possible. Thus, Verus was dispatched, and a number of legates were appointed to carry out his orders. According to Dio, Verus sent Avidius Cassius ahead to repel the Parthians from Syria, which he carried out with success.[323] This success, and indeed of the whole war itself are a clear reflection of Verus' wisdom in his tactics. Of course, the Romans' victories were largely the result of the soldiers' effort and discipline, but those qualities were instilled in them by Verus himself.

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[318] Fronto, 'Preamble to History', 12.

[319] Fronto, 'Preamble to History', 12-13.

[320] Fronto, 'Preamble to History', 13.

[321] Birley, A., (1966) p165.

[322] Cassius Dio, 71. 2. 1.

[323] Cassius Dio, 71. 2. 3.

Although the invasion is not well documented in ancient sources, an outline can be discerned drawing upon Cassius Dio and other literary sources. These show that Verus' legates, Avidius Cassius, Statius Priscus and Martius proved themselves as skilled military leaders. In 163 Priscus recaptured Armenia and installed his own candidate, Sohaemus, on the throne there.[324] Immediately following, the Romans turned south down the Euphrates, and captured Dausara and Nicephorium.[325] In the following year Cassius defeated a Parthian army in battle at Europos/Carchemish,[326] and then thrust into Mesopotamia. Victorious in the battle, Cassius then took Edessa and Nisibis, and then progressed down the eastern side of the Euphrates. Along his march Cassius must have captured Dura-Europos – Palmyrene inscriptions began to feature there from 168 with the dedication of its Mithraeum.[327] Finally, he took both Seleucia and Ctesiphon. Seleucia was sacked and the palace at Ctesiphon was destroyed.[328] However at this point plague hit the Roman army which suffered, according to modern estimates, a mortality rate of up to fifteen percent.[329] The consequent halt in offensive momentum allowed time for the Parthians to counterattack and Sohaemus was successfully expelled by them.

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[324] Cassius Dio, 71. 3. 1.Oates, D., (1968) p72.

[325] Fronto, *Ad Verum Imp.*, 2. 1. 3. Birley, A., (1966) p176.

[326] Lucian, 20. Edwell is surely right in identifying Europos/Carchemish as the site of the battle, rather than Dura-Europos, as Birley assumed. See Edwell, P., (2008) p116. Birley, A., (1966) p140.

[327] Rostovtzeff, M., Bellinger, A., Hopkins, C., Welles, C., (eds.) *The Excavations at Dura-Europos: Preliminary Report of the Seventh and Eighth Seasons 1933-1934 and 1934-1935.* Yale University Press. New Haven. (1936) pp83-4, inscription number 845. Edwell, P., (2008) p116.

[328] Cassius Dio, 71. 2. 3., 'Verus', *Historia Augusta*, 7., Birley, A., (1966) p189.

[329] For a detailed discussion on the plague itself, see Littman, R., and Littman, M., (1973) 'Galen and the Antonine Plague', in *The American Journal of Philology*, Vol 94, No 3, pp243-255. For mortality rate figures in the Roman army see especially p255.

Suffering desperately from the plague, the Romans calculated that their achievements to that point were sufficient enough for them to cut their losses and withdraw. However, by failing to conquer Parthia they had left Vologases free to continue to resist Rome's interests in the East for the duration of Marcus Aurelius' and Commodus' principates. Fortunately for Rome though, Vologases' military forces had been damaged from the war enough so that he could not reassert Parthia's control along the Euphrates again. As a result Vologases' counter-attack could not recover Parthia's fortunes. Rome, however, thanks to Verus and his legates' victories, retained a foothold between the Euphrates and Khabur Rivers, and new territory extending as far as Dura-Europos.[330]

Satisfied with their accomplishments, in spite of the devastating plague, Verus and Marcus Aurelius held a joint triumph through Rome. But as the *Historia Augusta* states, during the procession the plague infecting Verus' army was witnessed throughout the city, tingeing it with much sadness.[331]

Verus' Invasion's Impact on Trade

In this section the aftermath of Verus' incursions into the East, especially economic and social, is the subject of investigation. In presenting its case it draws particularly upon numismatic and archaeological evidence as discussed in scholarship. To clarify, there is some debate surrounding such evidence. Thus Sellwood's 'Parthian Coins' in the *Cambridge History of Iran* portrays, through analysis of coinage, a very different picture of conditions to Keall ('Parthian Nippur and Vologases' Southern Strategy: A Hypothesis', in *The Journal of the American Oriental Society*) who draws upon the archaeological record. As a result, Sellwood has argued that given the consistency of coinage in the Near East Verus' invasions had little overall effect on the region, while Keall argues that that view is a fallacy. In this dissertation a middle-ground is adopted, drawing upon the best points from both sides. It will be shown that while economically

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[330] Sheldon, R., (2010) pp161-162, see also notes 69 and 70.

[331] 'Verus', *Historia Augusta*, 7. 3ff., 'Marcus Antoninus', *Historia Augusta*, 12ff.

there was indeed a continuance, in other aspects of society there was much upheaval. In doing so it will be shown that a broad reading of current scholarship is imperative to an understanding of the topic. Studies in archaeology also assist in clearing any confusion resulting from scholarly debate. In particular, Matthews' 'The Tax Law of Palmyra' article in *The Journal of Roman Studies*, and Hopkins' 'The Palmyrene Gods at Dura-Europos' in *The Journal of the American Oriental Society* illuminate for us what society in Dura-Europos and Palmyra was like following Verus' invasions. But regardless, once again given that modern treatments on the issue is not prolific, a closer look at the ancient evidence itself is essential to a sound understanding and that is the method followed below.

As stated, the impact of Verus' invasion on the Parthian economy and trade between the two empires is a matter of debate. Sellwood has argued that the consistency of geography and minting of Parthian coinage both before and after Verus' invasion shows that Verus did not wreak any substantial havoc on its economy.[332] Ferguson agrees but nonetheless concedes that there could have been a little disruption to the Parthian economy.[333] However, whilst numismatic evidence is crucial to understanding history, and indeed remains critical to the study of Parthian history in particular, interpretation must be made in light of all evidence. Even Sellwood admitted that within the unsophisticated economy of ancient Parthia, a consistent high rate of coinage circulation might not indicate economic stability at all, but may rather mean simply that the metals needed to strike coins were prolific at that time.[334] Another anomaly of Parthian coinage is the profusion of coins minted in Persia during the final decades of the Arsacid dynasty. Sellwood recognized that this was no sign of an unhealthy economy, and that Parthian political affairs appeared under no threat by Persia on account of this profusion.[335]

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[332] Sellwood, D., (1983) 'Parthian Coins', p297.

[333] Ferguson, R., (2005) p12.

[334] Sellwood, D., (1980) *An Introduction to the Coinage of Parthia*. Spink and Son Ltd. London. p248.

[335] Sellwood, D., (1980) pp286, 290.

However, Sellwood acknowledged that during that time there was civil war between Vologases VI (reigned 208-228AD) and his brother Artabanus IV (reigned 216-224AD), and that both of them were overthrown by the Sassanids who were from Persia.[336] Therefore, whilst numismatic evidence is useful when determining some historical features, it is by no means indicative of other broader issues.

However, what is certain is that by the 130's the Palmyrenes had an ever strengthening role in east-west caravan trade,[337] and that was a position they would not give up easily to Parthia. If anything, the consistency of Parthian coinage shows the continuance of that status quo. That was a status quo that Rome was particularly keen to exploit and build upon. In fact, in the years following Verus' campaigns, Rome invested much capital into Palmyra's mercantile wellbeing, building additions to the temple of Bel, installing a Roman garrison under C. Vibius Celer, and constructing a new parade ground for Roman armies. Such support sustained Palmyrene mercantile prosperity and economic control in the Near East,[338] and so, as Richmond has put it, the golden age for Palmyra probably continued.[339] Verus' incursions may not have wreaked too much havoc with Parthia's economy, but Palmyra certainly continued to profit.

Palmyrene prominence in the commerce of the region was facilitated in other ways by Rome as well. To return to the numismatic evidence, coinage minted at Edessa after Verus' campaigns feature the epithet *Philorhomaios*, at Carrhae coins were also minted with the word *Philoromaioi* as a description of its inhabitants' political loyalties, and since Singara later bore the title Aurelia, it may have been made a Roman colony using

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[336] Debevoise, N, (1938) pp263ff.

[337] Keall, E., (1975) p632.

[338] Richmond, I., (1963) 'Palmyra Under the Agis of Rome', in *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol 53, parts 1 and 2, p50.

[339] Richmond, I., (1963) p53.

Roman currency at this time as well.[340] That Roman titulature and mercantile relics existed is silent witness that Palmyrene traders were still operating in the area. Pro-Roman coinage would have been useful for Palmyrene traders operating in the regions where they were circulated. The Romans had clearly invested much into Palmyra both economically and architecturally. Obviously, they would not have done so if they did not expect Palmyrene traders to make the most of it and simply do what they had done so well in the past - trade. Thus, there was a continuum in the economic sphere of the Mesopotamian region after Verus' interlude.

However it cannot be denied that there is little evidence that has survived to teach us about this period: literature is lacking, and there are markedly fewer inscriptions in Palmyra describing trade as there was before. This has led Gawlikowski to surmise that the Parthian king, Vologases IV (reigned c.147-191AD) must have barred all further contact with Romans after Verus' invasions in order to rebuild his own power base and reassert Parthia's control over its trade arteries.[341] If correct, that presented the Romans and Palmyrenes with a challenge, but it was one they were ready to accommodate.

Besides Parthian hostility, there were other forces undermining Rome's interests: nomad raids on caravans probably continued. Although there is no definitive proof for this,[342] some evidence for it is found in inscriptions at Palmyra dated before Verus' invasions and after Septimius Severus' wars which state that Palmyrenes were actively guiding and guarding caravans during those periods.[343] It appears that the Palmyrenes continued to provide military escorts for caravans to markets along the Euphrates: in the

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[340] On coins at Edessa and Carrhae, and conditions at Singara, see Oates, D., (1968) p72-73.

[341] Gawlikowski, M., (1994) p31.

[342] Sartre, M., (2005) pp70, 238f.

[343] For Palmyrene guides before Verus' invasions, see Matthews, J., (1984) p165, Seyrig, H., (1950) p6. For Palmyrene military escorts following Severus' Parthian wars, see Matthews, J., (1984) p168.

late 2nd century AD, the Palmyrene Aelius Boras, as one inscription shows, was celebrated with statues in the city for his repeated efforts in fighting off nomad raids on caravans as their military escorts' general.[344] Ogelos, another Palmyrene, was also commemorated for leading military expeditions against nomad raiders.[345] The archaeological evidence also shows that Palmyrene militarism was characteristic of trans-Euphrates trade immediately following Verus' wars. At Dura-Europos, located on the west side of the central region of the Euphrates River, there is clear evidence that Palmyrene military forces were garrisoned there at this point.[346] Edwell suggests that they were Palmyrene archers, and indeed inscriptions in Palmyra do make mention of their archers.[347] By garrisoning the town Palmyrene troops were taking the necessary step to maintain and secure the caravan trade which passed through.[348] However, with fewer merchants' inscriptions at Palmyra in this period, and fewer caravans arriving from the East, trade between the Roman Empire and the East clearly diminished.

Dura-Europos was originally a Seleucid town that was taken over by the Parthians in the late 2nd century BC until its capture by the Romans led by Cassius during Verus' war, and which became famous in the early 1920's when it was discovered and later excavated by archaeologists Cumont and Breasted. Much of Roman Dura's ruins include pagan, Jewish and Christian religious buildings, but of Parthian Dura little has survived. Nonetheless, its Hellenistic roots were maintained throughout, and a parchment found there which has been dated to AD180 makes mention of the cult of Seleucus Nicator.[349]

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[344] Matthews, J., (1984) p168.

[345] Matthews, J., (1984) p168.

[346] On the history of Dura-Europos, see Millar, F., (1998) 'Dura-Europos Under Parthian Rule', in Weisehofer, J., (ed.) *Das Partherreich Und Seine Zeugnisse. The Arsacid Empire: Sources and Documentation.* Franz Steiner Verlag Stuttgart. p473f. See especially also Dirven, L., (1999).

[347] *PAT* 0253. Edwell, P., (2008) pp32, 117.

[348] Matthews, J., (1984) p169.

[349] Millar, F., (1998) p473f.

As Dura-Europos was located on the Euphrates River between Palmyra to the northwest and Mesopotamia to the southeast, the town was influenced by both regions, especially in regard to local religion, as sculptures found at Dura demonstrate. Archaeology has shown that Palmyrene-style temple architecture existed alongside Parthian Ahura-Mazda, fire worship and Parthian king ruler cult there.[350] Consequently, Cassius had captured a site in prime strategic position and social importance to secure and extend Palmyrene - and thus Roman interests as well - into the Parthian empire's Mesopotamian heartland.

Nonetheless, whilst fewer merchants worked the trade routes, those who did were able to translate higher risk into an increase in profits.[351] Thus, Romans and Palmyrenes ensured that some semblance of financial continuity remained, and that may explain the numismatic consistency. However, in reality, they were simply taking advantage of the diminishing presence of Parthian power in the Mesopotamian plains. In fact, from Verus' invasion on, Parthia's own overseeing of East-West trade increasingly waned. Possibly due to the nomad raids, and the decrease in number of trade caravans bound for Roman markets due to Vologases' apparent economic policy, Parthia's control over the trans-Euphrates leg of the Silk Route was crumbling, and that allowed Rome and Palmyra to capitalise. That was to continue until Vologases' death in 192.[352]

Thus, despite the likelihoods of Vologases' embargo, and increasing nomad raids, the Romans and Palmyrenes were ready to respond to the changed conditions. In fact, Vologases' policy to bring trade with the West to a grinding halt generally resulted in Parthia's loss, for Rome and Palmyra soon sought out direct trade with China, ignoring the need for Parthia's Silk Route trading stations for the first time. Marcus Aurelius even sent an embassy to China to open diplomatic negotiations that must have included talks on trade. As the *Han Annals* of China recorded:

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[350] Hopkins, C., (1931) 'The Palmyrene Gods at Dura-Europos', in *The Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol 51, No 2 (June) pp119, 124f, 127, 128, 131-132, 134.

[351] Sartre, M., (2007) p272.

[352] Gawlikowski, M., (1994) p31.

"During the [Chinese] Emperor Huan-ti's reign [166AD] when the king of Ta-ts'in, An-tun [Marcus Aurelius], sent an embassy which, from the frontier of Jih-nan [Annam], offered ivory, rhinoceros horns and tortoiseshell. From that time dates the intercourse with this country."[353]

At first glance, the giving of such gifts seem simple enough and do not by themselves indicate that Romans were opening up any significant trading ventures with the Far East. However, closer investigation proves otherwise. In the *Zizhi tongjian*, written by the Song Dynasty Chinese historian, Sima Guang, it is recorded that in 105BC Parthian envoys traveled to the Chinese royal court bringing with them gifts of ostrich eggs and magicians.[354] It was from this date that trade opened up between China and Parthia.[355] The practice of exchanging gifts as a gesture that trade between them would continue was one that continued for centuries. Hence, according to the *Hou Hanshu*, in AD87 lions and a gazelle were offered as gifts to the Chinese court as a sign of friendly ties, and later in AD101 more lions and an ostrich were also sent to China to signify that trade-relations would be maintained.[356] Therefore, the act of giving of gifts to the Chinese court naturally carried an understanding of the commencement and maintenance of trade between it and the gift-giver. Consequently, we can see from the evidence that Keall was right when he wrote that Verus' invasion caused total disruption of the economy of, and a steady decline for, Parthia.[357] Given the damage wrought by Verus' legates and their victorious armies upon Parthia, Vologases could do very little, even with an embargo, to reverse Roman gains.

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[353] *The Western Regions According to the Hou Hanshu: The Xiyu chuan (Chapter on the Western Regions)*. See discussion of this source in Wheeler, M., (1955) p174.

[354] *Zizhi tongjian*, juan 21. Tao, W., (2007) p100.

[355] Watson, W., (1983) 'Iran and China', in *The Cambridge History of Iran*, 3 (1), p542.

[356] Tao, W., (2007) pp100-101.

[357] Keall, E., (1975) p632.

Statues dedicated in temples throughout Hatra from this time depict their gods in military dress.[358] It is unclear whether or not these statues were petitions for Parthian military remonstration against the Romans, and how entrenched such a sentiment was among Parthia's subjects. But whatever the case, it is clear from the numismatic, archaeological and Chinese records, that Vologases could not respond sufficiently to the call to resist Rome's and Palmyra's commercial expansion into Asia proper, despite his best efforts to undermine it. Rome and Palmyra had invested too much into the enterprise to succumb, and as a result, sought out alternative ways to trade with the East and Far East. Through a military presence along the Euphrates, Palmyra had shown its designs to control trans-Euphrates trade. Rome too, through political allegiances reflected in her coinage in the east, and successful diplomacy in its opening of direct trade with China, showed that it was also determined not to suffer from Parthia's stern resistance. Therefore, Rome continued to have the Palmyrenes at hand to exploit the situation for their - and Rome's – advantage, leaving Parthia at a disadvantage.

[358] Oates, D., (1956) p194.

Septimius Severus and Parthia

It will now be shown Severus' motives for, and conduct of, his Parthian war. For Septimius Severus' principte we are fortunate enough to possess both Cassius Dio's and Herodian's narratives. Also, an excellent survey of that princeps exists in Birley's *Septimius Severus: The African Emperor*, which analyses both of these ancient sources together with others and the archaeological records. Unfortunately, other treatments of Severus are generally introductory, although Brian Campbell's article 'The Severan Dynasty' in *The Cambridge Ancient History* holds a wealth of information on his Parthian campaigns. For the Parthian side of the war Debevoise's *A Political History of Parthia* once again shows itself as an excellent resource on Parthian matters and deals in some detail on Parthian issues during the war. Whilst it is apparent that there is a limitation in scholarship on the war, by analyzing the ancient sources together with the scholarship that nonetheless exists, we can still determine Severus' motives for the war as well as how he conducted it.

The principate of Septimius Severus marks a period of continuity and change. The status of Palmyra as a leading trading city remained, but Severus' policy of to bolster military presence in the eastern provinces reflects a shift in how that status was ensured. This presence is indicative of the resurgence of a hostile Parthia, who mustered their conscript army and made one of their last great acts of defiance against Rome in 193AD.[359] Civil war had engulfed the Roman Empire and Parthia pledged alliance with Pescennius Niger against his rival for the throne, Septimius Severus. As that civil war continued the Parthians felt that this was an opportune moment to seize back the parts of

[359] On Septimius Severus' Parthian war see Birley, A., (1988) *Septimius Severus: The African Emperor*. Yale University Press. pp115f, 129f. See also Sheldon, R., (2010) pp163-171.

Mesopotamia previously lost to Rome and proceeded to lay siege to Nisibis. But Severus quickly emerged victorious over Niger and marched at the head of an army against the Parthian forces. As we lack any 'insiders' knowledge of exactly why he decided to march against Parthia when it had taken no active part in the civil war, there have been many attempts to explain his reasoning. According to the contemporary Herodian, Severus used Hatra's alliance with Niger as a pretext for war, but in fact he had other motives driving him. He wrote that Severus only:

> "wanted to win a reputation for himself not just for winning a civil war over Roman armies (which he was ashamed to celebrate as a triumph) but also by raising monuments for victories against the barbarians."[360]

However, little is known about the life and identity of Herodian other than the fact that his work generally reflects Roman elitist attitudes, and although he often claims first-hand knowledge, there are passages in his work where he clearly borrowed from other sources like Dio.[361] In fact, Herodian's judgment of Severus' motives may have been a deduction made on account of the triumphal arches Severus later erected to commemorate his various victories, including the 'Arch of Severus' built in Rome in 203AD to celebrate his successes against Parthia.

In contrast to Herodian, Dio, another contemporary and Roman Senator, believed that Severus' motive was simply "a desire for glory", but it was an empty glory Dio believed, because Mesopotamia had by then little to yield, while the cost of keeping a Roman force there was too exorbitant for such little gain.[362] Noticeable here are the similar motives Dio attributed to Trajan for a Parthian war. It is unclear how in-depth Dio investigated this matter of motive in regard to Roman commanders waging wars against Parthia, or if such comments were stock in trade for him. Certainly, Trajan's triumphal tour to the

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[360] Herodian, 3. 9. 1.

[361] Sidebottom, H., (2007) pp78-82.

[362] Cassius Dio, 75. 1-3.

Persian Gulf was planned to enhance the emperor's glory, and Severus was able to capitalize on his Parthian war with regard to his public image as well as Rome's economy, so Dio's point holds some ground. But there was unmistakably more than one motive driving him eastward. As for Dio's comment that the war was too costly with too little gain, that was his own personal complaint on the lack of merit of the war as is clear from his narrative.[363] Of course, he was not alone in such a view: Moscovich has also argued that this complaint was a popular one held by other literati sophists as well.[364] However it was not one shared by Severus.

In modern times there have also been many theories put forward as to why Severus invaded Parthia, but it is generally agreed that, besides glory, Severus' lack of military distinction drove him on to a foreign war.[365] Severus was known for his shrewdness in many matters Dio stated,[366] and invaded Parthia, as Birley has argued, in order to address these ends.[367] Birley points out that military glory against foreigners would put the civil war out of the minds of his subjects, and would also boost the morale among the armies on which his legitimacy for the throne rested. It also may have occurred to Severus, while legate of IV Scythia in the East fifteen years earlier, that the Euphrates was not an effective line of defence in any case.[368]

One may add to these motives an acute desire for funds. On Severus' succession the imperial treasury was nearly empty, and in the subsequent war against Parthia Severus tried twice, although unsuccessfully, to capture and therefore pillage and sack Hatra. He

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[363] Cassius Dio, 75. 3. 3.

[364] Moscovich, M., (2004) 'Cassius Dio's Palace Sources for the Reign of Septimius Severus', in *Historia: Zeitschrift fur Alte Geschichte*, Vol 53, No 3, p368.

[365] Campbell, B., (2005) 'The Severan Dynasty', in *The Cambridge Ancient History*, Vol 12, p5.

[366] Cassius Dio, 74. 15. 1.

[367] Birley, A., (1988) pp115f.

[368] Birley, A., (1988) p115.

did succeed, however, in capturing Seleucia and Babylon, and Ctesiphon was captured and sacked.[369] Severus was actually in a similar situation, financially, to Vespasian when he became princeps; both were desperately short of funds. But there was one variant that tipped the scales for a war under Severus: Parthia's war-chest, unlike when Vespasian was princeps, was bankrupt after its own civil war. The coinage of Vologases V (AD191-208) is scarce, considerably scarcer than under any of his predecessors and successors. This is indicative of a crippled economy.[370] Thus the way was open for Severus to overcome a weak foe in Parthia.

With a weak Parthia as Severus' target, the means had thus presented itself for the princeps to replenish his coffers and allow his soldiers to secure loot for themselves as well.[371] However, that was not the lone result of capturing a city. It also helped secure the loyalty among a general's troops to him, thus increasing his popularity and rapport with them.[372] For Severus, civil war still remained clear in his and his soldiers' minds, and for the sake of his principate's security let alone his imperial glory, he had to secure the goodwill and allegiance of his armies. In fact, Dio himself raised the possibility that Severus' campaign was launched solely for the purpose of looting cities, since he let Vologases escape and chose not to occupy Ctesiphon.[373] This is an acute observation, and can not be ignored. Therefore, Severus had several motives for a Parthian war: the desperate need of funds, personal security, a boost in morale for an empire tired from civil war, and the benefits that were attached to military glory for any Roman general; and it was to the cities in Mesopotamia that Severus looked to meet them. In light of these pressing factors, a foreign war against Parthia must have seemed all too tempting for the emperor who sorely needed to wage one.

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[369] Cassius Dio, 76. 9. 3-4.

[370] Sellwood, D., (1980) p281.

[371] Gilliver, C., (1999) p129.

[372] Gilliver, C., (1999) p129.

[373] Cassius Dio, 76. 9. 4.

Severus' first objective of his first campaign was Osrhoene, which was promptly annexed. A local king of Edessa, Abgar, however, was allowed to retain his kingdom, albeit at Roman disposal. Birley has argued that the local Arabs and Adiabenes must have given signs of submission since Severus adopted the titles 'Arabicus' and 'Adiabenicus' on his coinage from this point.[374] Those titles also appear on his victory arch in Rome in 203AD.[375] However, Birley adds, they must have rebelled soon after this because throughout 195 Severus was acclaimed *imperator* three times over enemies on the battlefield.[376]

Up to this point Severus remained virtually unopposed by the Parthian army which was in Persia and Media putting down rebellions. It was content, so the Syriac source the Msiha Zkha states, to foment insurrection among the Arabs and Adiabenes for the moment and return to the field once the Persians and the Medes were dealt with.[377] Severus, too, was content to let the Parthians simply be for the moment, and so as to not insult them he refused the title of 'Parthicus' until a more appropriate later date.

However, because a new civil war was fomenting in the western Empire against Clodius Albinus, Severus had to leave Mesopotamia to deal with the insurrection. Lucius Valerius Valerianus,[378] a trusted equestrian legate of Severus' was left in charge of the army in the East. Valerianus carried on the war there but it appears that he did not fight a Parthian army. Rather, he was content to restore stability by launching expeditions

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[374] Coinage see *RIC* 4 50, 51, 55, 62, 63, 690, 690b, 691, 696. *RIC* 40. 118. *BMCRE* 40. 120, 557, 137. 555. Birley, A., (1988) p116.

[375] *Arch of Septimius Severus.* Birley, A., (1988) p116.

[376] Birley, A., (1988) p116.

[377] Msiha Zkha, in Birley, A., (1988) p117.

[378] On L. Valerius Valerianus, see Speidel, M., (1985) 'Valerius Valerianus in Charge of Septimius Severus' Mesopotamian Campaign', in *Classical Philology*, Vol 80, No 4, (October) p323-324. See also Birley, A., (1988) pp98, 113, 117, 246, note 13.

against bandit Arabs and nomads around the area.[379] But the Parthians, who had by then successfully put down the insurrections to the east, returned to the west and as punishment for the Adiabenes' disloyalty, and as a clear message to other subjects contemplating submission to Rome's armies, they plundered and sacked several Adiabene cities.[380]

In 197 Severus took charge of another army made up of three new legions, the *Parthica I, II,* and *III,* and this time he had made plans to permanently conquer Parthian territory, moving down the Euphrates with an army and war-fleet. This was a marked difference between Severus and Marcus Aurelius. Marcus had unwisely shifted Rhineland and Danubian legions to the East thus exposing Rome's northern frontiers to enemies across those rivers ready and willing to attack. Severus, however, had learnt from Marcus' mistake, and instead maintained the Rhine and Danube forces and raised the three new *Parthica I, II,* and *III* legions to carry out the war in the East.[381]

Once again the Parthian army retired before Severus, and the emperor entered both Babylon and Seleucia unopposed on the one-hundredth anniversary of Trajan's succession. The Parthians had once again withdrawn because they were forced to. Not only was Severus' attack unexpected, but to the east the Parthian king Vologases V was faced with rebellion, and given that one of his own brothers had escorted Severus' army, he could ill afford to let further civil discord increase throughout his empire.[382] Civil wars and revolts had plagued the Parthian Empire for much of its history. Indeed the Arsacid monarch's official title 'King of kings' belies the reality that the monarch was a ruler over many other aspiring rulers, the goodwill of whom he relied on for his own power to prosper. In fact, infighting among the Parthian King and his lesser kings was so common

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[379] Speidel, M., (1985) p323-324.

[380] Msiha Zkha, in Debevoise, N., (1938) p259.

[381] Smith, R., (1972) 'The Army Reforms of Septimius Severus', in *Historia: Zeitschrift fur Alte Geschtiche*, Vol 21, No 3 (3rd Qtr) pp482-485.

[382] Campbell, B., (2005) p6.

throughout the Parthian Empire that Tacitus assumed it was a royal tradition. As Tacitus makes Vologases I say in his *Annals*:

> "By abandoning the tradition of brotherly feuds and family strife, I thought I had settled the affairs of our family satisfactorily."[383]

But of course, even if these words contain a kernel of truth, it is telling that there were Parthian kings willing to reverse such 'tradition' for the sake of the stability of their own empire's wellbeing. But such effort Severus was now attempting with great force to undermine. Faced with such danger in both war and potential civil war Vologases had no choice but to withdraw before the Romans, contend with the rebellion to the east, and simply hope that Parthia's tried and trusted tactics would confound the Roman attackers one more time.

Unopposed, Severus marched on Ctesiphon which was sacked and plundered and its population killed or sold into slavery.[384] It was more than just a simple act of war. In fact it was a move that was heavy with meaning in the Roman context. Severus was intent on propagating himself as an extension of previous emperors. Already he had proclaimed himself the son of Marcus Aurelius as denarii bearing the inscription 'Son of the deified Marcus Pius' indicates.[385] He would also proclaim himself adopted brother of Commodus and of divine descent through Nerva.[386] As a result, Severus was careful to only invade regions in the east penetrated by the armies of his imperial predecessors like Trajan and Verus. The larger campaigns of Alexander the Great were simply not as politically powerful as those more modest ones of his Roman precursors. But for Severus the sacking of Ctesiphon meant more than just a continuum. It was a culmination. By sacking

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[383] Tacitus, *Annals*, 15. 2.

[384] Cassius Dio, 75. 9. 3-4, Herodian, 3. 9. 9-11. See also Birley, A., (1988) p130. Sheldon, M., (2010) p167.

[385] Birley, A., (1988) p117.

[386] Birley, A., (1988) p118.

it Severus was calling a crescendo and an end to the Antonine and pre-Antonine wars that had preceded his own. On the 28th January 198 Severus proclaimed an end to the campaign announcing that Parthia had now been properly conquered, and he adopted the title 'Parthicus Maximus', just as Trajan had done, and on the same date that Trajan assumed power exactly one hundred years earlier.[387]

But, of course, that was not the whole truth. Parthia's empire was not completely subjugated at all, and Severus extensively fortified his conquests anticipating wars waged against it either by himself or his successors in the future. Nevertheless, Severus' announcement was a signal to the Roman world that he was intent on maintaining imperial precedence to legitimize his rule. However, desire for further conquests cannot be denied given both the defensive and offensive natures of Roman fortifications.[388]

Severus soon besieged Hatra which still remained unconquered. Hatra was a fiercely defended Parthian outpost which acted as a frontier fortress between the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers. Its militarism and mobilization at this time are clearly reflected in its sculpture. Statues dated to this period increasingly depict military dress, and in one inscription found there a suppliant called upon Samya the Eagle patron god of the city to save it from its moment of dire "weakness".[389]

In the end Severus abandoned the siege and Hatra retained its independence. But if Severus had sought to gain the loyalty and goodwill of his troops, this was still left partly unrealized for at this point in the campaign there was mutiny among them.[390] According to Dio, Severus later made another attempt to capture Hatra to put his troops to use and secure their allegiance if given a victory over the city there, but that attempt too proved

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[387] Birley, A., (1988) p130.

[388] Gilliver, C., (1999) p129.

[389] Oates, D., (1956) p194.

[390] Cassius Dio, 76. 10. 2-3.

unsuccessful.[391] Nevertheless, he gloried in his new conquests, and as Dio wrote, Severus liked to boast that he had made a secure "bulwark of Syria" in the annexation of his new provinces east of the Euphrates.[392]

Mesopotamia was now proclaimed a new province under the governance of an equestrian prefect as was the case in Egypt, and its city of Nisibis was declared one of three capitals and *coloniae* with Singara, near the Tigris, and Resaina in Mesopotamia's west. Osrhoene remained a province.[393] Kennedy has found that the stationing of Roman forces well east of the Syrian Euphrates could only have been deeply disturbing for the Parthians.[394] Certainly, it added further to their civil woes. What was left of Vologases' loyalists simply had no option but to make a lackluster withdrawal, and this time there would be no help from the one-time Parthian territories in Mesopotamia. As Debevoise emphatically put it, the destruction caused by the Romans escalated the rapid decay of Parthian power already under way.[395]

To celebrate Severus' victories against Parthia a triumphal arch was erected in the Roman forum in 203AD, which features reliefs depicting Roman military actions in Mesopotamia. There are four main reliefs. Section 1 in the southeast part portrays action before a city's walls, section 2 in the northeast shows the capitulation and surrender of another city, section 3 in the northwest the siege and capitulation of a city by a river (Euphrates or Tigris), and in section 4 in the southwest part the fall of a city. Throughout the twentieth century a number of theories were put forward in order to identify the

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[391] Cassius Dio, 76. 10. 1.

[392] Cassius Dio, 75. 3. 2.

[393] Birley, A., (1988) pp115, 117, 132.

[394] Kennedy, D., (1996) *The Roman Army in the East.* Journal of Roman Archaeology, Supplementary Series 18. Ann Arbor. Kennedy, D., (1987) 'The Garrisoning of Mesopotamia in the Late Antonine and Early Severan Period', in *Antichthon*, Vol 21, pp57-58.

[395] Debevoise, N., (1938) p262.

events those reliefs actually depicted. It has been suggested that section 1 shows the liberation of Nisibis from the Parthian siege, section 2 the submission of Edessa or Seleucia, section 3 the capitulation of Seleucia or Babylon, and section 4 the fall of Ctesiphon.[396] However, it has been recognized that such theories miss the actual motivation behind the erection of the arch, because a comparison between the arch and the literary sources indicates that it was not intended to be a factual representation of events of the war. Herodian's narrative omits any mention of fighting at Nisibis, Eddesa, Seleucia and Babylon, and only describes engagements around Hatra and Ctesiphon;[397] while Dio states that Seleucia and Babylon surrendered unconditionally without any resistance;[398] so theories about fighting depicted in the artwork on the arch are questionable. In fact, art and architecture were undergoing serious change whereupon older forms of realistic depictions like those on Trajan's column gave way to newer ones of defamiliarised modes of expression.[399] Thus, deliberate use of ambiguity was employed to decorate the arch to communicate a more subtle message than mere representation.[400] The message on the arch should be seen therefore, as less about actual events during the war than the legitimacy of Severus' principate. As Campbell points out, the timing of the erection of the arch was of crucial importance – built soon after the tenth anniversary of Severus' accession, the arch affirmed his achievements in rescuing

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[396] See Hulson, C., (1906) *The Roman Forum: Its History and its Monuments*. Ermanno Loescher and Company. Platner, S., (1927) *A Topographical Dictionary of Ancient Rome*. Oxford University Press. Brilliant, R., (1967) *The Arch of Septimius Severus in the Roman Forum*. Rome. Bober, P., (1971) 'Review: The Arch of Septimius Severus in the Roman Forum', in *The Art Bulletin*, Vol 53, No 2 (June) p243.

[397] Herodian, 3. 9. 3-11.

[398] Cassius Dio, 76. 9. 3.

[399] Huskinson, J., (2005) 'Art and Architecture a.d.193-337', in *Cambridge Ancient History*, Vol 12, p679.

[400] Bober, P., (1971) p243.

the state from civil war and extending its power over foreign enemies.[401] Therefore, although not a chronicle of Severus' war with Parthia, his arch, and indeed the very war it exhibited, nonetheless served real political purpose.

[401] Campbell, B., (2005) 'The Severan Dynasty', in *Cambridge Ancient History*, Vol 12, p7.

Arch of Septimius Severus. Source: Birley, A., (1988) Illustration 15.

Together with his arch, Severus' war with Parthia served his principate well. Victorious in a foreign war, the Roman treasury replenished, and a large measure of

allegiance within the armies reaffirmed, Severus was able to restore to Rome the stability and imperialist pride it had been lacking after the civil wars. Thus, Severus could take credit for a resurgent and united Roman Empire, and in doing so the legitimacy of his principate was reassured.

Severus' Restoration of Palmyrene Trade

The effects on the socio-political and economic landscape resulting from Severus' war with Parthia were far-reaching and are the subjects of this section. Analysis of such a topic requires careful handling of the archaeological evidence as well as current scholarship that surrounds it, and is undertaken thus here. As a result, Kennedy and Riley's *Rome's Desert Frontier* is a priceless compilation for such a task since it evaluates aerial images of remains of Roman forts and fortresses in the East established under Severus' rule. But in particular, James' important *Excavations at Dura Europos: Final Report VII – The Arms and Armour and Other Military Equipment* is most illuminating in its analysis of conditions at Dura-Europos from this period on. A. H. M. Jones' *The Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces* also provides good explanation of archaeological findings at Palmyra, Dura-Europos and other locations in Syria, which is critical to understanding the issue of Septimius Severus' eastern policy. Indeed, it is precisely that policy which is largely elusive to history due to gaps in scholarship for the period, but it is one that is identified and discussed in this section.

With the death of Vologases V, and victory in the East, Septimius Severus could reestablish the presence of Palmyrene traders on Rome's behalf in the region - but by doing so on a military basis Severus was signaling that his goal and methods in the East were different to those following Verus' earlier incursions. Where Marcus Aurelius and Commodus had sought to allow the region to be largely under the charge of Palmyra in the face of Parthian resistance and nomad opposition, Severus sought to directly control his province of Mesopotamia and enforce Palmyro-Roman economical interests. But others, most notably nomad groups, also recognized the weakness of the region and made their own claims there. They were an ongoing obstacle that the Palmyrenes had to

confront. An inscription from Palmyra dated to 199AD commemorates one Ogelos who had launched a number of forays against such nomads, who had persisted in furthering their own interests in the region. It reads:

> "Ogelos son of Makkaios, son of Ogelos, son of Agegos, son of Seviras, for his complete virtue and courage, for his continuous expeditions he has raised against the nomads, always providing safety for the merchants and caravans on every occasion on which he was their leader."[402]

Indeed, Ogelos' was not a sole case. In fact, many Palmyrenes were now enlisted by Severus into the Roman army to enforce order around their city and beyond. The town was now garrisoned under Severus by the XX Palmyrenorum cohort.[403] Papyri from Dura-Europos indicates that its numbers approached 1,200 men at any given time.[404] Richmond has argued that this cohort was part of a local militia employed by the Romans to defend the surrounding bleak environs against nomad raiders,[405] however in reality it represented much more than just that. It appears, for one thing, that the cohort was formed from, and a development of, the Palmyrene archers that had already seen service in Dura-Europos since the 160s.[406] For another, its employment in the town marks a decided shift in imperial policy. Until then the garrison was modest in size. But under Severus, the town saw a far more substantial garrisoning with the investment by the

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[402] *PAT* 1378.

[403] Richmond, I., (1963) p51. Sartre, M., (2005) p137.

[404] Welles, C., (1959) see Papyrus numbers 82, 89, and 100. James, S., (2004) *The Excavations at Dura Europos: Final Report VII – The Arms and Armour and Other Military Equipment*. British Museum Press. London. p19.

[405] Richmond, I., (1963) p51.

[406] Welles, C., et al., (1956) pp24, 26-27.

cohort.[407] Indeed, this cohort was not the only detachment of troops that saw service in the town. Vexillations of the Syrian legions, the IV Scythia and the XVI Flavia Firma, now garrisoned the town, along with other detachments from the III Cyrenaica and the X Fretensis.[408]

The social aspect of the garrison also changed. In Dura-Europos the Roman garrison became central to the town's community and even built a Mithraeum for the locals, who introduced the Palmyrene garrison there to the cult of Mithras to use.[409] Furthermore, their presence was greatly valued by both Romans and Parthians. For them, the Palmyrene forces were not raised solely to fight off Arab bandits or to secure the safety of traders. They were maintaining the important lines of communication between Rome and Parthia.[410]

But Palmyra was not left to complete the task by itself for long. Severus had established the new province of Mesopotamia,[411] and in c.210 he stationed two of his Parthica legions in it. Aerial photography over the Near East shows that Roman fortresses and forts that were built from Jordan in the south to Syria and modern-day Iraq in the north and east.[412] Such moves had the desired effect: with an increase in inscriptions in

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[407] Dabrowa, E., (1981) 'La garnison romaine a Doura-Europos. Influence du camp sur la vie de la ville et ses consequences', in *Cahiers Scientifiques de l'Universite Jagellanne DCXIII*, pp63-64.

[408] James, S., (2004) pp18-19.

[409] Downey, S., (1998) p163.

[410] Matthews, J., (1984) p169.

[411] See Birley, A., (1988) p132f. Sartre, M., (2005) p135-136.

[412] Kennedy, D., and Riley, D., (1990) *Rome's Desert Frontier: From the Air*. B. T. Batsford Limited. London. pp111-138.

Palmyra honouring traders[413] it appears that Palmyra's, and thus ultimately Rome's taxable interests, were forcibly reassured in the region as trade reestablished itself there.

It was a longstanding Roman military custom to fortify army marching routes at steady intervals so as to supply them with shelter and protection.[414] Consequently, Agricola's fortifications throughout Scotland were placed 15 miles apart to protect passing armies on the march.[415] Septimius Severus continued this practice.[416] Since soldiers marched far more than they fought in battle it was crucial to their success in war that appropriate resting points and defensive areas were properly established. The result was that the eastern provinces generally, and the province of Mesopotamia in particular, were thoroughly fortified and invested with soldiers, providing effective defense and useful staging points for offensives.[417] Severus' establishment of forts throughout the East gave a clear signal of the guarding of his recent conquests, and hailed that future conquests were possible.[418]

The effect on the ground of Severus' program of militarization is seen clearly in the ruins of Dura-Europos.[419] There, the city was turned into something more like that of a fortress with the garrison's headquarters located in the northern quarter. In fact the whole of the northwest section of the town, a portion roughly 10 hectares in area was rebuilt by

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[413] For a description of these inscriptions, see Gardner, I., Lieu, S., Parry, K., (2005) pp72, 73, 91, 99.

[414] Gilliver, C., (1999) pp59f., 63f.

[415] Gilliver, C., (1999) pp46f.

[416] On Septimius Severus' camps, see Gilliver, C., (1999) p49. Kennedy, D., and Riley, D., (1990) pp111-138.

[417] On the roles of fortifications in the Roman army, see Gilliver, C., (1999) pp63-88.

[418] Gilliver, C., (1999) On Agricola and Severus see p49. On the use of forts for protection as well as future attacks see pp60-62.

[419] On the ruins of Dura-Europos, see James, S., (2004) and also Edwell, P., (2008) pp93-148.

vexillations from various legions including the IV Scythia and perhaps the III Cyrenaica, was turned into a military camp that could lodge a legionnaire garrison between 500 to 2,000 numbers-strong at any time.[420] According to Pollard evidence such as this points to the conclusion that from the first to the mid-third centuries the Roman military and the civilian population of the provinces ran along very different lines and hardly ever had an affect upon the other; and that the Roman military identity was introspective to such an extent that all other external factors, such as civilian lifestyle, had no place.[421] But, it is a mistake to presume that this meant that the garrison's role was purely militaristic. The garrison served a purpose that went beyond that: in Dura-Europos the garrison constructed baths, an amphitheatre, a temple of Jupiter Dolichenus, and a palace for the Dux Ripae.[422] Indeed, as much as being for soldiers, these buildings were for civilian activity as well. Furthermore, Garrison-force troops were also routinely billeted in homes right throughout the town.[423] Thus the juxtaposition of the military and civilians should not be pressed too hard. In fact, the same point can be said for the empire as a whole: throughout the rest of the empire civilian communities and soldiers were closely tied,[424] not only in Syria, but the whole of the Roman eastern provinces as well.[425]

It is worth remembering that Roman armies attracted all sorts of retinue and hangers on, among them merchants, soothsayers, prostitutes, allies, and servants.[426] As a result,

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[420] James, S., (2004) pp16, 18, 19. Edwell, P., (2008) pp118, 119, 141, 142.

[421] Pollard, N., (2000) *Soldiers, Cities and Civilians in Roman Syria.* Ann Arbor. University of Michigan Press. p7.

[422] Downey, S., (1998) p163-164.

[423] James, S., (2004) p18.

[424] Alston, R., (2001) 'Soldiers, Cities and Civilians in Roman Syria by Nigel Pollard', in *The American Historical Review*, Vol 106, No 5, p1850.

[425] Sidebottom, H., (2003) 'The Army in Syria', in *The Classical Review*, Vol 53, No 2 p432. McClellan, T., (2005) 'Nigel Pollard, Soldiers, Cities and Civilians in Roman Syria', in *The Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, Vol 64, No 3 p221.

[426] Gilliver, C., (1999) pp29-31, 82.

their social and economic impact on the scene could be dramatic. Notably, Roman forts and camps served diplomatic purposes as well as military ones. As can be seen in one particular papyrus from Dura Europos dated to 208AD which was written by the Syrian governor to a number of Roman army garrisons, Roman camps often entertained Parthian ambassadors journeying from the East along the Euphrates River to the Roman Empire. It reads:

> "See to it that Goces, the envoy sent by Parthia to our lords the most mighty emperors, is offered the customary hospitality by the quarter-masters of the units through which he passes. And of course write to me what you spend on each unit. [Units at] Gazica, Appadana, Dura, Eddana, Biblada."[427]

As this discussion shows, Roman armies, like those on service at Dura-Europos, served more than a military purpose. They were cultural units that shared their cultural facets with the surrounding populations. Indeed, the soldiers serving under Severus, besides being military forces, arguably had the greatest social and economic impact on the Near East since the reign of Domitian: for under Severus Roman soldiers had a rise in pay – their first since the time of Domitian.[428] Roth has found in the case of Judaea a trend which can also be applied regarding Rome's other eastern provinces, that besides militarization, the resulting increase in exchange of goods from the greater monetization under Severus, also served Rome's economic purposes: it resulted in the creation of new markets – both within army garrisons and outlying indigenous settlements. Roth adds that this facilitated the building of infrastructure, urbanization and further monetization, and replenished Rome's treasury through taxation.[429]

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[427] See Welles, et al., (1959) papyrus number 60B.

[428] Smith, R., (1972) p492.

[429] Roth, J., (2002) 'The Army and the Economy in Judaea and Palestine', in Erdkamp, P., (ed.) *The Roman Army and the Economy*. J C Gieben. Amsterdam. pp386, 388, 397.

However, Severus' army reforms extended beyond the realms of purely military and economic concerns. They addressed social and cultural needs as well: for the first time in Roman history, Severus allowed soldiers the right to marry while on campaign.[430] This gave them the unprecedented opportunity them to co-mingle, cooperate and collaborate with local peoples on a previously unheard of scale. Thus Roth noted that in this, together with the creation of new markets and infrastructure, there resulted further expansion of Romanization throughout the Near East.[431]

As a result, Severus' military reforms carried great social, political, military and economic change, and added enormously to the prosperity of the armies and the populations surrounding Roman garrisons and stations. Although some contemporary Romans, including both Herodian and Dio, disliked Severus' reforms and could not see the sense in them,[432] they were not lost on others, Smith argues, who valued an effective, well cared for, military presence throughout the empire.[433]

However, it would be too hasty on account of this to jump to the conclusion that all of Septimius Severus' reforms were beneficial to the empire. As part of his reforms, perhaps to offset the armies' rise in pay, Severus laid all of the costs of the maintenance of roads, stations, and the imperial postal service which included countless pack-animals, on the provinces themselves.[434] Although this measure was implemented to boost transport and

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[430] On Septimius Severus' army reforms, see Smith, R., (1972) p485ff.

[431] Roth, J., (2002) pp386, 388, 397.

[432] Cassius Dio, 75. 2. 3. Herodian, 3. 8. 5. On Dio's literati peers, see Moscovich, M., (2004) 'Cassius Dio's Palace Sources for the Reign of Septimius Severus', in *Historia: Zeitschrift fur Alte Geschichte*, Vol 53, No 3, p368.

[433] Smith, R., (1972) p493.

[434] Duncan-Jones, R., (1994) *Money and Government in the Roman Empire*. Cambridge University Press. pp3, 15, 56.

troop movement around the empire,[435] it failed to be sustained by local communities unable to afford the upkeep and corruption and deterioration of the service ensued.[436] However, despite this decline in the transport system, by securing the region with the military, trade was actually able to recover and even increase. Coinage of Vologases VI was profuse enough between the Euphrates and Tigris, as Sellwood has observed, to indicate thriving trade with the Roman Empire.[437] Indeed at Dura-Europos there are also signs of bustling trade along the Euphrates. North African Red-Slip pottery and Syrian Sigillata dishes from this period have been found by archaeologists in large numbers, once again indicating the trade along this river was thriving.[438]

As Severus colonized his conquests beyond the Euphrates, he aimed to settle the region and maintain Rome's interests there, and to facilitate ample opportunity for the sustenance and livelihoods of veterans there too. As a result, Singara became Aurelia Septimia, Rhesaina became Septimia Rhesaina, and Nisibis, Septimia Nisibis.[439] Carrhae, too, was colonized, since the title of colony appears on its coinage at this time, and at Rhesaina coins minted there now bore the name of the third Parthian legion. To the west of the Euphrates, Palmyra was also granted colonial status.[440] As a result, the whole region from Syria and across the Euphrates was reorganized as a new economical, social, political, as well as military zone.

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[435] Wells, B., (1923) 'Trade and Travel in the Roman Empire', in *The Classical Journal*, Vol 19, No 1 (October) p16.

[436] Wells, B., (1923) p16.

[437] Sellwood, D., (2000) p297.

[438] Heath, S., (2012) 'Trading at the Edge: Pottery, Coins, and Household Objects at Dura-Europos', in Chi, J., and heath, S., (eds.) *Edge of Empires: Pagans, Jews and Christians at Roman Dura-Europos*. Institute for the Study of the Ancient World. New York University. p63f.

[439] Jones, A., (1971) *The Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces*. Clarendon Press. Oxford. pp220-221.

[440] Jones, A., (1971) pp220-221. On Palmyra see p266.

Severus' reforms were intended to be long lasting: Smith's argument that Severus could not have foreseen Caracalla's offensives in the East[441] is unsubstantiated and, indeed, is countered by the very nature of his militarization of his new eastern conquests. His fortifications served defensive and offensive purposes,[442] and Severus had calculated that there would indeed be further Roman incursions, perhaps many, into Parthian territory in the foreseeable future. What he had not calculated on, however, was the failure of Caracalla to strike a decisive blow against Parthia, nor the ascendancy of Sassanid Persia which succeeded where Caracalla had failed. However, despite this major setback Severus did at least secure a measure of stability in the Middle East.[443]

Caracalla

The origins of Caracalla's war with Parthia are notoriously difficult to estimate solely by investigating current scholarship. For the war itself, Jones' *The Cities of the Eastern Roman Provinces* is indispensable, as is Butcher's article 'The Mint at Zeugma' in Kennedy's (ed.) *The Twin Towns of Zeugma on the Euphrates*. For the Parthian side Debevoise's monograph is of equal value. However, even in such literature there is lacking a convincing case for Caracalla's actual motives for the war. As a result, consideration and re-evaluation of he ancient sources at hand, Dio and Herodian, is required and it is to them this thesis repeatedly turns. Unfortunately, Dio's narrative is fragmentary and survives only in epitomes, while Herodian's worth on this topic is somewhat limited. But since there is also a gap in scholarship on this topic, an acquaintance with these sources is absolutely necessary to understanding the topic and the value of such an acquaintance will emerge below with regard to Caracalla's principate.

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[441] Smith, R., (1972) p489.

[442] See Gilliver, C., (1999) p60.

[443] Smith, R., (1972) p489.

By the time of the accession of Caracalla, Roman armies had marched further east than ever before, and they became the targets of the Medes and Persians, whose powers were on the rise. As Dio put it:

> "...now that we have reached out to peoples who are neighbours of the Medes and Parthians rather than of ourselves, we are always, one might say, fighting the battles of those peoples."[444]

But Caracalla, despite the dangers, sought military glory in the east regardless. According to both Herodian and Dio, by 213AD their contemporary princeps Caracalla was already fomenting dynastic struggles in Parthia.[445] In fact, Dio and the *Historia Augusta* state that Caracalla had admired Alexander's achievements in the East for quite some time and it was for that reason that the emperor sought to forcefully control Parthia.[446] Although Romans often compared themselves to Alexander when they campaigned in the East, there may be other grounds to argue that Caracalla had prepared for a war with Parthia for some time. Indeed, Campbell noted that for some time beforehand Caracalla had implemented an army recruitment drive, increased minting in the eastern provinces, and that in 213AD he summoned the vassal kings of Armenia and Osrhoene to Rome to be recognized as Roman nominees in their kingdoms.[447] Clearly, preparations were being made by Caracalla for an offensive in the East.

Dio states that when the Parthians would not hand over to the Romans certain wanted persons, Antiochus the Cynic philosopher and Tiridates the Armenian, he deployed his legate Theocritus with a force to invade Armenia. Theocritus was soundly defeated, but that only escalated matters and Caracalla's dreams of asserting his rule over the East were

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[444] Cassius Dio, 75. 3. 3.

[445] Herodian, 4. 10. 1. Cassius Dio, 78. 19. 1.

[446] Cassius Dio, 78. 7f, 22. 'Antoninus Caracallus', *Historia Augusta*, 1-2.

[447] Campbell, B., (2005) p19.

given the required pretext for their realisation.[448] When Caracalla offered marriage to the daughter of the Parthian king Artabanus V and was flatly refused he declared war.

However, it would be wrong to assume that Caracalla's sole motivation for a war in the East was to seek Alexander-like glory. In fact, other, deeper motives for making war upon Parthia can be determined with some certainty by investigation of the sources, but discernment is required. According to Cassius Dio, by the time Antiochus and Tiridates left Rome for Parthia relations between the two empires were already cold, hence Caracalla's refusal to surrender them.[449] As a result, Caracalla launched an expedition, Dio states, against Parthia. However, once Antiochus and Tiridates were relinquished to the Romans, Caracalla called the expedition off.[450]

Longstanding cold relations between Rome and Parthia are also reflected in Herodian, and his evidence for Caracalla's Parthian wars provides a context for his motivations. According to Herodian, Caracalla simply sought military glory in the East and the title 'Parthicus'.[451] Although Whittaker contests such statements as a standard charge against Roman emperors who campaigned against Parthia,[452] there is evidence that there is some merit to Herodian's comments on the following grounds. Caracalla's first expedition against Parthia was launched on the centenary of Trajan's own Parthian war. Trajan had himself assumed the title 'Parthicus' and by recalling his predecessor's grandeur within his own principate he was also establishing his own. In fact, this link with Trajan was central to Caracalla's motivations. His father, Severus, legitimised his own principate by appealing to Roman memory of imperial predecessors. Caracalla was doing the same. That is why after his second expedition against Parthia in 217AD Caracalla promptly

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[448] Cassius Dio, 78. 19.

[449] Cassius Dio, 78. 19. 1.

[450] Cassius Dio, 78. 21. 1.

[451] Herodian, 4. 10. 1.

[452] Whittaker, C., (1969) *Herodian: History of the Empire, Books 1-4*. Harvard University Press. pp428-429, note 3.

announced the subjugation of the East and the submission of lands east of the Tigris River. Much was made of Caracalla's admiration for Alexander in the *Historia Augusta* during his youth.[453] I would suggest that during his principate Trajan's fame was equally admired, if not more so, by Caracalla. By campaigning as Trajan had done throughout Mesopotamia and east of the Tigris, on the one-hundred year anniversary of Trajan's Parthian war, Caracalla was signaling the nature and purpose of his own principate. Indeed, there is also evidence that Caracalla did assume the title Parthicus. Herodian stated that in 217 the emperor was awarded triumphal honours,[454] and the title may have been associated with them. The *Historia Augusta*, too, recorded that Caracalla took up the title, although it places its adoption after the emperor's first expedition in 215,[455] rather than his second in 217 as Herodian reported. As a result, there is certainly proof that Caracalla was not solely interested his own fame but rather had the longevity of his principate and thus the security of his empire in mind when he launched his Parthian expeditions.

However, Caracalla did not simply seek to recreate Trajan's glory either. In actual fact, his motive for war in Parthia could have been otherwise, and he may have been forced to resort to war by Parthia. There is even proof that Caracalla initially had the interests of his empire, and indeed that of Parthia's too, in mind, which only when destroyed by Parthia, led to war. In 217 Caracalla made his offer of marriage to the daughter of one of the two contenders for the Parthian throne, Artabanus. According to Herodian, Caracalla held out the hope to Artabanus that if their empires were united there could be no more wars between them, and that together they could fight off and even conquer their enemies. There was also an economic side to this pact: Parthian trafficked spices and garments could be traded for Roman metals and manufactured goods with more ease than was currently the case.[456] Although Caracalla himself had much to gain

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[453] 'Caracallus', *Historia Augusta*, 2. 9f.

[454] Herodian, 4. 11. 9.

[455] 'Caracallus', *Historia Augusta*, 6. 7f., 11. 2f.

[456] Herodian, 4. 10. 3-4.

by a marriage arrangement, as he would then have claim to the Parthian succession,[457] Artabanus also had much to gain. His own claim to the Parthian throne would be vastly strengthened, and Parthia's own security in the face of any external military threats would be ensured. Seeing the wisdom in this, Artabanus agreed.

However, according to Herodian, during celebrations Caracalla attacked the unarmed members of the Parthian court and following this he led a Roman army throughout Mesopotamia and beyond the Tigris, looting and pillaging as he progressed unchallenged.[458] Both Dio and Herodian condemn these acts as savage and unnecessary on the part of the emperor.[459] However, the error may have been Artabanus' own. He had initially agreed to the pact, and if followed through it would have ensured the economical prosperity of both the Parthian and Roman Empires. Furthermore, with Caracalla's additional offer of continual peace there would have been brought about an end to the longstanding cold relations that existed between them. However, according to Dio, it was Artabanus who eventually rejected the offer made to him.[460] Dio does not mention the wedding celebrations described by Herodian, but it may have been during them, if they ever existed, that Artabanus rejected it. According to Dio, the Parthian king did not ultimately wish Caracalla to have a stake in Parthia's internal affairs.[461] Enraged at Artabanus' refusal, which if it took place during celebrations attracting many of Parthia's nobles must have made it more a centerpiece event, Caracalla unleashed his onslaught. Perhaps Caracalla had anticipated possible condemnation for these events like those of Dio, Herodian, and no doubt others, and thus he had kept in political play a possible recourse to Trajan's exploits one hundred years earlier to secure his proposals acceptance by Parthia. If so, despite the wedding's failure, by laying extensive political groundwork

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[457] Bivar, A., (1983) p95.

[458] Herodian, 4. 11. 1-8.

[459] Cassius Dio, 79. 1. 1-3. Herodian, 4. 11. 1-8.

[460] Cassius Dio, 79. 1. 1.

[461] Cassius Dio, 79. 1. 1-3.

Caracalla was able to successfully turn public humiliation on a global scale into one of military glory.

One must not underestimate the importance of Caracalla's offer of marriage. As Herodian states, if Roman infantry and Parthian cavalry were to join forces and unite:

> "...they would surely have no difficulty in ruling the whole world under a single crown."[462]

By rejecting the offer, Artabanus was not only rejecting Caracalla's involvement in Parthian political and court affairs, but was also rejecting an offer of peace. It must have seemed to Caracalla that in his rejection of marriage, Artabanus was choosing war over peace, and that the military attack of 217 was his only option. Yet, given that after so many wars launched by Romans over the last century, deep seated bitterness towards them and the desire to ensure their own place in Parthian affairs by the Parthian nobility, must have made refusal appear the only option available, and Artabanus, whatever his concerns for peace were, needed their support.

At the head of an army Caracalla marched as far as Media, sacking many Parthian cities and strongholds along the way, and even desecrated the Parthian royal tombs. As Severus had done before him, Caracalla proclaimed victory, and coins were struck with 'VIC(TORIA) PART(HICA)' to mark his achievements.[463] As Verus and Severus had also done before, Caracalla promoted the colonial Romanisation of the lands between the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers. Thus Carrhae became known as Antoniana Aurelia Alexandriana, Dura-Europos was refounded and became Aurelia Antoniniana, and Edessa's coins at this point also began bearing the titles Aurelia Antoniniana, suggesting that Caracalla had refounded it too.[464]

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[462] Herodian, 4. 10. 4.

[463] Debevoise, N., (1938) p266.

[464] Jones, A., (1971) p221.

Caracalla also enacted a return to the policy to promote private and public trade ventures among Rome's subjects: between 213 – 217 Zeugma and many cities of the Levant were minting their own coinage.[465] However, as the titles on Edessa's coins demonstrate, this policy was also designed to maintain Roman prestige, not to mention the ultimate economic control Romans gained through the levies and taxes placed upon those who traded with such local coinage. Once again, locals were encouraged to look to their own devices and initiatives for riches, and the imperial treasury awaited inevitable taxes accrued through those same means.

As numerous Parthian kings had done before him, Artabanus withdrew before the invading army. Roman troop movements at this time suggest that Caracalla believed the task of conquest was now an easy one, for the II Adriutrix was returned to Pannonia at this time.[466] However, Artabanus had withdrawn across the Zagros Mountains to recruit and train an army within the Parthian heartland in order to launch a counter-attack. In 217 it came and with his army he invaded Roman Mesopotamia and sacked several cities there. According to Dio, Caracalla planned to retaliate, but before he could muster a response he was assassinated.[467]

Warfare between Rome and Parthia throughout Mesopotamia and beyond the Tigris had left the region greatly weakened. Tacitus wrote that the Romans create desolation and call that peace.[468] This observation is also applicable to the Near East where both Roman and Parthian armies had created a deeply scarred battleground. Despite Caracalla's hopes for peace, after his death the pride, wealth, culture, literature, society, and cities of Parthia crumbled, and the interstate trade that had once flourished around its empire no longer thrived as it once did. Of course, Caracalla's recourse for military glory reflects the same

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[465] Butcher, K., (1998) p234.

[466] Campbell, B., (2005) p19.

[467] Cassius Dio, 79. 4. 1.

[468] Tacitus, *Agricola*, 30.

lust many other Roman emperors possessed, but regardless, it was such thirst for power which ultimately ruined Rome's chances of further conquest in the east. For the scarred lands between the Euphrates and Tigris Rivers lay vulnerable and open and the Sassanids were able to take control of it with ease.

In a startling paradox, it was logical that an imperial power like Rome would try to undermine its Parthian rival, but that by doing so would bring to the fore a power in Sassanid Persia even more dangerous. Perhaps the error was in the very nature of imperialism itself which is never satisfied, never entirely open to possibilities other than warfare and exploitation. The Palmyrenes had shown that healthy commercial competition could thrive and be inductive to growing rapport between neighbours. But for the Roman elite, Parthia was too often seen as a weaker and conquerable neighbour, with the result that complete Roman control was left largely unachieved over the Middle East – a region that in the wake of the fall of the Arsacid dynasty to that of the Sassanids was now one far more hostile to that same elite and its imperial designs on that region than it ever was.

CONCLUSIONS

Wars and periods of peace had varying results and did not establish homogenous conditions with consistent results. The economic aftermath of Trajan's war was very different to that following Verus' invasions, and indeed Severus' and Caracalla's. However, it did follow that heavy monetary and military investment was essential for the resumption of trade after destructive wars. Thus following periods of war, Hadrian's and Severus' investment in Palmyra meant that trans-Euphrates markets were able to recover, albeit in different forms, and that Rome was able to accrue handsome profits from trade with the East. However, the neglect of such markets following Verus' and Caracalla's wars shows that without secure attention to the economy, markets could decline, much to the advantage of other interested parties – notably Vologases and ultimately Sassanid Persia. Such findings are borne by the data discussed in this paper, summarized as follows.

Flavian policy in regard to Parthia was generally one of consolidation and preparation for a coming war with Parthia, but one that could not be launched under the Flavians themselves - that is, until Domitian began making plans for an invasion into Parthia itself – a plan the future emperor Trajan hastily adopted after annexing Armenia. Crassus and Antony had tried to invade it in the past, and in more recent times Nero and Domitian had laid plans to carry it out. Such a dream Augustus had tried to dispel by the retrieval of captured standards and prisoners and for some that was enough. But for others like Caracalla the dream of more conquests would remain vivid and strong.

When Trajan did eventually attack, the Parthians were as unable to stand against his army as he was later against Parthian forces. As a result Roman legions overran Mesopotamia but were unable to contain the rebellious threat within their conquests. When the Parthian army at last entered the scene Hadrian, the second in command and successor to the dead Trajan, had no choice but to withdraw. Nonetheless, Trajan had altered the social geography of the evacuated regions and that Hadrian was able to

exploit. With Elymais and Characene remaining friendly to Rome following Trajan's unopposed marched through their territories east of the Tigris and by the Persian Gulf respectively, the Romans could draw on the initiative of the Palmyrenes to conduct trade beyond Mesopotamia with their cooperation.

The Parthians were not wholly able to rescue their power in the region. Unable to retake Elymais and Characene, the Parthians had to be content to endure the Palmyrene ascendancy. In any case, they soon found acceptance of the newfound conditions expedient and collaborated themselves with traders - like the Palmyrenes - from the Roman Empire once again. But, of course, that did not spell the end of Parthian dreams of empire. On the death of Antoninus Pius the Parthian army took advantage of the political uncertainty in Rome and attempted to reconquer parts of their lost territories from the Romans in the west - hence Verus' immediate response.

Verus was co-emperor and thus as a choice denotes the importance of his commission. He was a somewhat robust character who took the retraining of the armies in Syria in hand. As a result his legates' invasions of the East proved wholly effective and greatly weakened Parthian power there, a development Palmyrenes were content to exploit. However the vacuum that followed brought to the fore a familiar but reinvigorated enemy to the reestablishment of security to the region in the form of Arab nomads who took their chances and raided the caravans and looted merchants along the Euphrates River. The Palmyrenes responded by continuing to provide caravans and traders with armed escorts for their trips down the River – a costly exercise, but one that was necessary if East-West trade was to continue with Palmyra at the helm.

As a result, trade was maintained and Palmyra's position secured. But when Septimius Severus, after having found himself in the purple and with no funds, created a pretext for war with Parthia, the status quo was once again altered. After the war the eastern Roman provinces were bolstered and security continued to be reinforced. Thus, instead of immediately following up with more campaigning, Severus was taking the Parthian question on slowly and methodically, a model he no doubt intended his successors to

follow too. Caracalla made use of Severus' arrangements to conquer Parthia and further his own imperial priorities despite Parthia's resistance. However, he was assassinated before those dreams were ever realized.

But the damage was irreparably done. Within a decade Parthia would fall to the Sassanid Persians, and yet militarism would remain throughout the Roman Empire as civil wars engulfed it during the third century. Palmyra would eventually reach such heights that it even rebelled against Rome and forged an empire for itself under Queen Zenobia, but in 273AD was sacked for its insolence – a startling illustration that within the Roman Empire a people's prosperity was only favoured by Rome so long as it served its imperial masters' own purposes.

The dream that so many Romans and Parthians had shared in the past of accruing riches, in so many forms be they by force or by building up one's rapport, for so many years, had finally been brought to an end. With the Persians blocking all trade in the East from Rome's markets, and the demise of Palmyra's economic prowess, the Roman world was plunged into a very different era, one of uncertainty – militarily, culturally, politically, and economically. The pinnacle of Roman-Parthian socio-political relations and the trade they conducted so dramatically had on many occasions been put to severe tests. In the new era, the resilience of those relations and the trade which had endured for so long, was lost, and was no longer seen as a serious possibility to return to. Roman and Persian armies would see to that.

Although such later details lay beyond the aims of this thesis, they are nevertheless still worth considering briefly, since with hindsight one might wonder whether or not had Rome and Parthia had possessed knowledge of these future events, if they would have acted differently. Would they have sought peace more often? Would they have monitored the actions of Palmyra more closely? On the other hand, the desire for more power exhibited by those, be they Roman or Parthian, would probably have discouraged the desire to pose such questions and answer them with total transparency.

To conclude, for Parthia, war with Rome meant searing loss as emperors and their legates invaded and devastated its cities and land. For Rome, war with Parthia simply brought to the fore another, stronger enemy to take its place. These are inescapable conclusions exhibited in this thesis. Perhaps Gibbon would have done better to pay this issue closer attention, rather than gloss over the obvious tragic realities that often lay hidden behind the so-called 'glories' of the past. But then masterpieces don't and can't always portray the whole truth.

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