

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

THE NISIBIS WAR (337-363 CE)

THE STRATEGIC DEFENSE OF THE ROMAN ORIENT

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the degree of Master of Arts in History

By

John Scott Harrel, MG (Ret.)

December 2012

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The thesis of John Scott Harrel is approved:

Dr. Donal O'Sullivan

Date

Dr. Joyce L. Broussard

Date

Dr. Frank L. Vatai, Chair

Date

California State University, Northridge

Dedication

To the men and women of the California Army National Guard and the 40th Infantry Division, who in the twenty-first century, have marched, fought and died in the footsteps of the legions I & II Parthia, Joviani and Herculiani.

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ABSTRACT

THE NISIBIS WAR (337-363 CE)

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The Roman Empire historically obtained success on the battlefield through its strategic offense ending with a decisive open field battle where the sword was the final arbitrator. Amongst all the wars fought by the Roman Empire against Persia, the Nisibis War (337-363) stands out as the first instance where Rome maintained a position of strategic defense. After a twenty-four year defensive war, a change in Emperors (from Constantius II to Julian) resulted in transition back to the strategic offense. Instead of expected success based on historic experience this time Rome was decisively defeated within six months. Historians have studied and analyzed the failed offense lead by Emperor Julian the Apostate, but have generally neglected the overall conflict. This neglect is surprising since up to this time of the Nisibis War the strategy was unique. The use of the strategic defense by small frontier (*limitanei*) armies, based in fortified cities and fortress, supported by maneuvers and limited operational and tactical offensives by the Field (*comitatus*) Army of the East allowed the Eastern Roman Empire to survive the advancing barbarians, as well as Persian and Muslim invaders until almost the 8th century. This thesis will focus on the importance of the Nisibis War and its resulting impact upon the defense of Rome's Eastern provinces.

Chapter 1

The Nisibis War (337-363): Thesis, Sources, and Methodology.

"Look With What Spirit The Cities Are Defended"¹

The study of military history has a wider scope than acknowledged by contemporary scholars. It is more than the story of campaigns and battles. It is a story of how societies form institutions to provide for their collective security and how those institutions operate during peace and war. It is a story of individual soldiers and their subculture. It includes the entire range of economic, social, legal, political, technological, and cultural issues that arise from a state's need to use all means, including violence to preserve its existence and achieve its collective goals.²

The Roman Empire historically attained success on the battlefield through its strategic offense ending with a decisive field battle or siege where the sword was the final arbitrator. The first instance of Rome maintaining a war strategy of strategic defense was against Persia during the Nisibis War (337-363). After a twenty-four year defensive war, a change in emperors resulted in transition back to the strategic offense. However, instead of expected success based on historic experience, Rome was decisively defeated within six months. Historians have studied and analyzed the failed offense led by the Emperor Julian (the Apostate), but have generally neglected the overall conflict and its impact on Rome's survival. Eastern Rome's strategic defense, until the eight century was to defend against invading barbarian, Persians and Muslims with small *limitanei* armies based in fortified cities with limited operational offenses by the regional *comitatus* armies.³ This thesis will focus on the importance of the Nisibis War and its resulting

¹ Ammianus Marcellinus, *Volumes I, II, III*, John C. Rolfe, trans., (Cambridge, Mass. and London England: Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, 1935, reprinted 2005), XX, 11.5, 73.

² Richard W. Stewart. *American Military History Volume I, The United States Army and the Forging of a Nation, 1775-1917* (Washington D.C.: Center of Military History, United States Army, 2005), 1.

³ See generally Edwin N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire* (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1979); Geoffrey Greatrex, *Rome And Persia At War, 502-534* (Leeds: Francis Cairns, 1998); Warren Treadgold, *Byzantium and Its*

impact upon the defense of Rome's Eastern provinces. Examination of Rome's eastern wars has become a current subject of interest as the United States and its allies are embroiled in a prolonged conflict in the Middle East; the same battlefield where Crassus' legions were destroyed; where Julian the Apostate was killed; and where Roman emperors and generals fought numerous fruitless wars against Parthian and Persian kings for almost six centuries.⁴

There are important issues addressed by this study. How did the Nisibis War differ from other wars between Rome and Parthia/Persia? Why was King Shapur II of Persia (here after Shapur) obsessed with recovering the lands lost to Rome by the treaty of 298 and specifically with the recovery of the city of Nisibis after almost four decades of peace? Was the decision of Emperor Constantius to take the strategic defense a deliberate decision or was it forced upon him by circumstances? Did the strategic defense have any influence on the development of the Eastern Roman Army in relation to the development of the Western Roman Army? How did logistical support impact military operations during the Nisibis War? Why did Julian's transition to traditional Roman offensive strategy fail? Were Julian's objectives obtainable with the resources at his disposal? What was the long-term impact of Julian's defeat on the subsequent defense of the Eastern Roman provinces?

Other than the Late Roman Republic, more contemporary accounts, routine records, and correspondence survive from the fourth century Late Roman Empire than any other period of antiquity. In examining the Nisibis War, the most important primary sources are the fourth century soldier historian Ammianus Marcellinus, the fourth century Greek sophist, Libanius, and the fifth century historians, Zosimus and Sozomen.

Ammianus Marcellinus was a staff officer who served with Julian's army during the Persian Campaign of 363. He was a pagan but his religious beliefs did not cloud his

Army, 284-1081 (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995); and Edward N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire* Cambridge Mass, and London, England: Harvard University Press, 2009).

⁴ Gareth C. Sampson, *The Defeat of Rome In the East: Crassus, The Parthians, and the Disastrous Battle of Carrhae, 53 B.C.* (Drexel Hill: Casement., 2008); Rose Mary Sheldon, *Rome's Wars in Parthia: Blood in the Sand* (Portland: Vallentine Mitchell, 2010).

objective account of history. He was familiar with the Mesopotamian theater of war. Born in Antioch c. 330, he became a member of the *Protectores Domestici* staff/guard regiment when he was in his twenties and joined the staff of the *Magister Equitum per Orient*, Ursicinus in 354. By the time of the Persian Campaign, Ammianus was an experienced staff officer and would have attended staff meetings with Julian and his generals.⁵ Historian Frank Trombley concluded that Ammianus “demonstrates an organic understanding of ‘operations’ in the modern sense of the term, with attention to personnel, intelligence, and timely movement of supplies and troops.”⁶ Ammianus admired Julian (perhaps due to shared pagan beliefs).

Ammianus negatively viewed Romans with a barbarian heritage. He mentions Count (latter *Magister Equitum*) Victor guardedly. Victor was repeatedly referenced, but without title, and Ammianus completely ignored the revolt of Queen Mavia in 375-378 which was a major event. Her defeat of a Roman army allowed her to dictate the peace terms including a political marriage between *Magister Equitum* Victor and her daughter.⁷ Victor was a successful Romanized and Christianized barbarian (Sarmatian) imperial general and Queen Mavi was a Christianized Saracen (Arab).⁸ Victor and Mavi personified two elements that Ammainus viewed with disfavor; they were both barbarians and both Christians.⁹

Ammianus was biased against Constantius because he suppressed the ‘admirable’ Julian, sacked Ursicinus (Ammianus’ patron) and employed a non-traditional defensive strategy. His analysis of events appears factually correct, but his analysis seems

⁵ John C. Rolfe’s Introduction to *Ammianus Marcellinus, The Later Roman Empire* Vol.I, ix-xiv.

⁶ Frank Trombley, “Ammianus And Fourth Century Warfare,” 17-28, Jan Willem Drijvers and David Hunt, eds. *The Late Roman World And Its Historian, Interpreting Ammianus Marcellinus* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

⁷ Iran Shahid, *Byzantium And the Arabs In The Fourth Century* (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library And Collection, 2006), 142-175.

⁸ Iran Shahid, *Byzantium And the Arabs In The Fourth Century*, 268-269.

⁹ Ibid., 272-274.

intentionally distorted to shift the blame for the Julian's failures during the Persian offensive to Jovian and, to a lesser extent, to Procopius.¹⁰

Frank Trombley described Ammianus as demonstrating “an organic understanding of ‘operations’, yet of the hundreds of regiments in the war he mentions few by name. Ammianus mixes unit descriptions between archaic and contemporary terms and his writing is sloppy, especially when compared to Julius Caesar’s War Commentaries.”¹¹ Caesar was reporting contemporary war news to the citizens of Rome. Even though Ammianus had personal knowledge he wrote years after the events to provide entertainment for Rome’s elite and accuracy was less important than meter and timing.

Zosimus was a fifth century Greek pagan historian and bureaucrat. His only surviving work, the *Historia Nova*, covers Roman history from 180-410. He was not a contemporary of the events. Much of his material is based upon the lost work of Eunapius. Eunapius, a pagan, was born around 345 and provided a pagan’s view of events from 270-404. The two complement each other with Zosimus providing details not found in Ammianus’ history.¹²

Sozomen (Salminius Hermias Sozomenus, c. 400 – c. 450) was a Christian church historian. His works cover the period 323-425 and are heavily dependent on earlier historians. He preserved valuable information on the history of Christianity in Armenia and the Sasanian Persians. Sozomen's second work, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Book V,

¹⁰ Peter Heath, “Ammianus on Jovian, History and Literature.” 105-114, in Drijvers and Hunt.

¹¹ Frank Trombley, “Ammianus Marcellinus and Fourth-Century Warfare.” 17-27 in Drijvers and David Hunt; and AM, XXIV 5.10, XXV 1.9,1.7,1.16, 1.19, 3.4.

¹² Michael H. Dodgeon and Samuel N.C. Lieu, *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars AD 226-363, A Documentary History* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), ix, xiv; Zosimus, *The History of Count Zosimus, Sometime Advocate and Chancellor of The Roman Empire*, unknown translator (London: W. Green And T. Chaplin, 1814).

covers church history as influenced by the contemporary events from the death of Constantius I to Julian but is biased against Julian.¹³

Libanius (314-393), a Greek sophist and resident of Antioch, was one of the most influential pagans of his time. His speeches and letters provide a wealth of information on the Roman East. He corresponded with participants in the various campaigns of Constantius and Julian.¹⁴ His most relevant work was his *Funeral Oration* to Julian that attacked the policies of Constantius and Jovian's treaty. In the Oration, intended to praise Julian's accomplishments, Libanius suggests that Julian was assassinated. Despite his pro-Julian bias, he provides valuable insight into the decision not to besiege Ctesiphon and the subsequent march up the Tigris.

Ioannes Mahala, a sixth century historian, produced a minor work based on a lost history written by Magnus of Carrhae. Magnus was a soldier who participated in the Persian Expedition. His name is similar with a tribune noted by Ammianus for bravery.¹⁵ Magnus disagreed with some facts recorded by Ammianus and Zosimus and is the only historian who attempted to record the reaction of King Shapur to Julian's campaign plan.¹⁶

Many of the less known ancient sources were not available in English until the twenty-first century. The study of Rome's Persian wars has long been 'bedeviled by' the diverse languages of the ancient sources (Latin, Greek, Arabic, Syriac, Hebrew, Palmyrene, Persian and Armenian). Historians Geoffrey Greatrex, Samuel C. Lieu, and Michael H. Dodgeon performed a great service by publishing the source books *The Roman Eastern Frontier And The Persian Wars Part I A.D. Part I 226-363 and Part II*

¹³ Dodgeon and Lieu, xiii, 268-269; Sozomen, *The Ecclesiastical History of Sozomen: Comprising A History Of The Church From A.D. 324-440*, Edward Walford, trans., (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1855).

¹⁴ Ibid., xi, 255-261.

¹⁵ Charles W. Fornara, "Julian's Persian Expedition in Ammianus and Zosimus," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, Vol.111 (1991), 1-15, 14, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/631884>. Accessed: May 19, 2010 14:35.

¹⁶ Ibid., xi, 261-265.

363-630 translating many of these minor works into English.¹⁷ Beate Dignas' and Engelbert's *Rome and Persia In Late Antiquity* focus on political goals, military confrontations, and analyze diplomatic solutions.¹⁸

The *Notitia Dignitatum* is one of the most important documents to have survived from Late Antiquity. It is generally believed to be an official document recording the defense establishment of the Late Roman Empire from c. 395-420. The Eastern Empire section probably dates from c. 395 while the Western Empire materials were compiled in c. 420-430. The document is a directory of civil and military office holders and provides location and composition of frontier commands and the various field armies. Care must be used when relying on this document because mistakes and omissions are abundant.¹⁹ Generally, the section on the Eastern Empire appears to be more complete perhaps due to its earlier date.²⁰

Several ancient military treatises provide standards by which to judge Constantius, Julian and Shapur as military leaders. The first is Sunzi's *On the Art of War*.²¹ Sunzi's (a.k.a. Sun Tzu) work is a military classic, still guiding twenty-first century military leaders. Sunzi was a successful Chinese general for the State of Wu in the sixth century BCE. The military principles articulated by Sunzi are surprisingly similar to those found in the Late Roman Army military treatise *Strategikon*, written in

¹⁷ Dogeon and Lieu, xx, xxi and 4-8; Geoffery Greatrex and Samuel N.C. Lieu, *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars, Part II, AD 363-630* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008).

¹⁸ Beate Dignas and Engelbert Winter, *Rome and Persia In Late Antiquity, Neighbors and Rivals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

¹⁹ Terrence Coello, *Unit Sizes In the Late Roman Army* (British Archaeological Reports S645, 1996), 44-50.

²⁰ Adrian Goldsworthy, *How Rome Fell* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2009), 285-290; Treadgold, 43-59.

²¹ *Sunzi: The Art of War, Sun Bin: The Art of War*. trans. Lin Wuaun (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 2007), 1-11. On his influence, see Harry G. Summers, Jr., *On Strategy: The Vietnam War in Context* (Carlisle Barracks: US Army War College, 1982); and Robert L. Cantrell, *Understanding Sun Tzu on the Art of War* (Arlington: Center for Advantage, 2003).

the late sixth century. The *Strategikon* is a cavalry manual that provides general information about infantry, tacked onto a detailed work on cavalry training and tactics.²² The third work, Vegetius Renatus' *Epitoma Rei Militaris*, believed to have been written during the reign of Roman Emperor Flavius Theodosius, (Theodosius I (347-395)), also provides applicable military leadership standards.²³ Vegetius was not a soldier, but his work on military theory contains basically the same principles found in *Sunzi* and the *Strategikon*. The three works entitled *Three Byzantine Military Treatises*, translated by George T. Dennis demonstrate that the Roman Art of War survived to the tenth century. The first text, *The Anonymous Treatise on Strategy*, appears to have been written by a combat veteran and engineer during the sixth century. The remaining two, *Skirmishing* and *Campaign Organization and Tactics*, were written during the tenth century.²⁴ In all of the Roman-Byzantine treatises the key to success are training, drill, the establishment of a fortified camp and reconnaissance.

Reviews of Late Roman Empire military operations have been popular from the eighteenth through the twenty-first centuries. George Rawlinson's seven-volume history *The Seven Great Monarchies Of the Ancient Easter World*, and Edward Gibbon's six-volume *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* are still relevant today.²⁵ While some discoveries in the twentieth and twenty-first century made some portions of these works dated, these great historians were not working under the handicap of modern technology. Other nineteenth century authors retained a historic appreciation of time and distance and would have encountered similar travel impediments as their Late Roman

²² Maurice's *Strategikon*, *Handbook of Byzantine Military Strategy*, trans. George T. Dennis (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press. 1984), xvii.

²³ *Ancient Strategists, Sun Tzu's On the Art of War and Vegetius' Epitoma Rei Militaris*, ed. Gareth Simon (United Kingdom: The Society of Ancients, 1994), 19-20.

²⁴ George T. Dennis, trans., *Three Byzantine Military Treatises* (Washington D.C.; Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1985), viii, ix.

²⁵ Edward Gibbon, *The Decline And Fall Of the Roman Empire, Volume I*, J.B. Bury, ed. (New York: The Heritage Press, (1946 reprint); George Rawlinson, *The Seven Great Monarchies Of the Ancient Easter World, Volume VII*, <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/16167/16167-h/16167-h.htm#linkBimage-0002>. Ebook reprint 2005. Accessed November 15, 2012, 21:00.

counterparts. Hardy explorers produced maps and travel logs published in nineteenth and early twentieth century scientific journals. They would have walked or rode a horse over the same terrain that Shapur's cavalry or Julian legions marched.²⁶

Any modern study of the Late Roman Empire should begin with A.H.M Jones' scholarly work *The Late Roman Empire 284-602*.²⁷ Jones' work is a social, economic and administrative survey of the Empire. The information gleaned from Jones is a prerequisite for *The Limits of Empire, The Roman Army In The East* by Benjamin Isaac, *The Roman Near East, 31 B.C.-A.D. 337* by Fergus Millar; and *The Roman Empire of Ammianus* by John Matthews.²⁸ Isaac's work traces Rome's goals and objectives in the eastern provinces, whether they achieved their results and what impact Rome's activity had on its eastern subjects. Millar's work complements Isaac's as a social history tracing the development of the East by the Roman army in relation to geography and changes in society imposed by the development of the new imperial system in the early fourth century. Mathew's analysis of Ammianus traces the transformation of the Roman world through the quill and experiences of the last great historian of the classical Latin tradition.

Study of the Late Roman Army is very popular with contemporary scholars. Authorities relevant to the thesis are: *The Late Roman Army and Roman Cavalry*, by Pat Southern and Karen R. Dixon; *Byzantium and Its Army 281-1081*, by Warren Treadgold; *Twilight Of Empire, The Roman Army From Diocletian Until The Battle of Adrianople*, by J. Nicasic; *The Rise and Decline of the Late Roman Field Army*, by Richard Cromwell

²⁶ L.V.S. Blacker, "Travels In Turkistan," *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 58, No. 3 (Sep. 1921), 178-197. URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1780485>. Accessed 27 June 2012 20:03; P. Kropotkin, "The Old Beds of The Amu-Daria [Oxus]," *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (Sep. 1898), 306-310. URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1774317>. Accessed 26 June 2012 20:23; and L.C. Dunsterville, "Baghdad to the Caspian in 1918," *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 57, No. 3 (Mar. 1921), 153-164. URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1780858>. Accessed: 27 June 2012 20:37.

²⁷ A.H.M. Jones, *The Late Roman Empire 284-602 Volumes I and II* (Baltimore: John Hopkins Press, 1964).

²⁸ Benjamin Isaac, *The Limits of Empire, The Roman Army in The East* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); Fergus Millar, *The Roman Near East 31 B.C.E.-A.D. 337* (Cambridge Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 1993); and John Matthews, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus* (Ann Arbor: Michigan Classical Press, 2007).

and *Frontiers of the Empire and Warfare In Roman Europe AD 350-425* by Hugh Elton. While these historians may disagree on the details of the transition of the Roman Army to the army that would be known as the Late Roman Army, or whether the Late Roman Empire had a grand strategy, they generally agree on the process of transformation and the beginning and end states.²⁹

Unlike the first century BCE, war and campaign analysis of the Late Roman Period are rare. Those that have been published deal primarily with the sixth through the tenth centuries.³⁰ No historian has published a work on the entire Nisibis War or attempted to reconstruct the defense of the Orient during the mid-fourth century. Those who have published articles have focused on specific sieges or Julian's campaign in 363.³¹ Historian W.E. Kaegi has published a short article on "Constantine's and Julian's Strategies of Strategic Surprise" and B.H. Warmington has published a short article on the "Objectives and Strategy of Constantius II." Both articles are excellent but of limited focus and address strategy without a detailed analysis of the terrain, weather or the opposing commander, Shapur.³²

²⁹ Richard Cromwell, *The Rise and Decline of the Late Roman Field Army* (Shippensburg: White Mane Publishing Company, Inc., 1998); Karen R. Dixon and Pat Southern, *The Roman Cavalry* (London: Routledge, 1992); Pat Southern and Karen R. Dixon, *The Late Roman Army* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996); M.J. Nicasie, *Twilight of Empire, The Roman Army from The Reign of Diocletian until the Battle of Adrianople* (Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben, Publisher, 1998); Treadold[?]; Hugh Elton, *Warefare In Roman Europe, AD 350-425* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); Hugh Elton, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire*, (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indian University Press, 1996); Brian Todd Carey, *Road to Manzikert: Byzantine and Islamic Warfare, 527-1071* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword, 2012).

³⁰ Greatrex (1998) *Rome And Persia At War, 502-534*; and John Haldon, *The Byzantine Wars* (Gloucestershire: The History Press, 2011).

³¹ R.C. Blockley, "Ammianus Marcellinus on The Persian Invasion of A.D. 359," *Phoenix*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (Autum, 1988), 244-260. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1088346>. Accessed 9 December 2011 14:11; C.S. Lightfoot, "The Third Siege of Nisbis," *Historia: Zeitschrift fur Alte Geschichte*, Bd. 37, H. 1 (1st Qtr., 1988), 105-125. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4436041>. Accessed: 03 July 2012 20:08.

³² W.E. Kaegi, "Constatine's and Julain's Strategies of Strategic Surprise Against the Persians," *Athenaeum*, Vol. 59, (1981), 209-213; B.H. Warmington, "Objectives and

No detailed study of the Late Roman logistical system has been undertaken. The classic study of ancient army logistics is Donald W. Engels', *Alexander the Great and the Logistics of the Macedonian Army*.³³ Published in 1980, this study has been the primary foundation for the analysis of Roman military campaigns until Jonathan P. Roth published *The Roman Army At War, (264 BC-AD 235)* in limited edition in 1999.³⁴ Both studies are relied upon herein since the technology of logistics did not change from the fourth century BCE to the mid-fourth century and the daily food and fodder requirements did not change for man nor beast until modern processed foods of the twentieth century replaced unprocessed rations in the military diet.

Archeological evidence supports and elaborates the ancient sources. The Roman fortress city of Dura-Europus, on the Middle Euphrates was stormed, sacked and abandoned by the Persians in the mid-third century. It has become a time capsule for the study of Persian siege techniques, Roman defensive tactics and social interaction between the civilian population and the Roman Army.³⁵ Most of the key fortress cities in the Roman Orient have remained inhabited down to the twenty-first century and as a result have been extensively studied.³⁶

What is known of third and fourth century Sasanian dynastic history has been derived from distorted versions of an early tenth century historical compendium presented by *al-Tabari* (839-923) and a massive epic completed by *Firdawsi* in the early

Strategy in the Persian War of Constantius II," *Limes: akten des XI Internationalen Limeskongresses*, (Budapest: Akademiai Kiado, 1977), 509-520.

³³ Donald W. Engels, *Alexander The Great and the Logistics of the Macedonian Army* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1980).

³⁴ Jonathan P. Roth, *The Roman Army At War, (264 B.C. –A.D. 235)* (Leiden, Boston and Koln: Brill, 1999).

³⁵ Simon James, *Excavations at Dura-Europos, 1928-1837, Final Report VII, The Arms and Armor and other Military Equipment* (London: British Museum Press, 2010).

³⁶ Shelagh Gregory's work *Roman Military Architecture on the Eastern Frontier, Vol. I, II and III* (Amsterdam: Adolf H. Hakker, 1997).

ninth century.³⁷ Historian James Howard-Johnson concludes that both of these sources have pockets of authentic information augmented by anecdotes, romantic and heroic stories, and “triggers for fanciful elaborations.”³⁸

The secondary sources on Sasanian Persia are many and varied and cover all aspects of Sasanian society.³⁹ The main sources used in this study are Touraj Daryee’s *Sasanian Iran (224-651 CE)*, Ahmad Tafazzoli’s *Sasanian Society*, Kaveh Farrokh’s *Shadows In The Desert, Ancient Persia at War*, and James Howard-Johnson’s *East Rome, Sasanian Persia and the End of Antiquity*.⁴⁰ As the Sasanian army matured over the centuries, from a feudal host to a semi-professional army, it developed a series of military texts similar to the *Strategikon* and *Epitoma Rei Militaris*. Unfortunately, these texts did not survive other than as cited sources in early Islamic military texts.⁴¹ Some analysis of King Shapur’s war plans may be deduced from terrain analysis and data derived from Roman and Armenian sources.

³⁷ Al-Tabari, *The History of al-Tabrai, Volume V, The Sasanids, The Byzantines, The Lakmids, and Yemen*, C.E. Bosworth, trans., (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999).

³⁸ James Howard-Johnson, “The Two Great Powers in Late Antiquity: a Comparison.” 157-226, 169-173, ed., Averil Cameron, *The Byzantine And Early Islamic Near East* (Princeton: The Darwin Press Inc., 1995).

³⁹ Touraj Daryaei, “A Review of the Encyclopedia Iranica.” *Iranian Studies, Vol. 31*, No. 3/4 (Summer-Autumn 1988): 431-461.

⁴⁰ Touraj Daryaei, *Sasanian Iran (224-651 CE)* (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 2008); Ahmad Tafazzoli, *Sasanian Society* (New York: Bibliotheca Press, 2000); Kaveh Farrokh, *Shadows In the Desert, Ancient Persia At War* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2007); and James Howard-Johnson, *East Rome, Sasanian Persia and the End of Antiquity* (Burlington and Surrey: Ashgate Publishing, 2010).

⁴¹ William Hamblin, “Sasanian Military Science and its Transmission to The Arabs.” *BRISMES proceedings of the 1986 International Conference on Middle Eastern Studies* (Oxford: Brismes, 1986), 99-106.

This thesis is a military history and as a result will follow a methodology similar to a modified campaign analyses. Military history cannot be viewed as a separate “quaint” subset of history. It is a reflection of society and all of its complexities.⁴² As historian Stephen Morillo observed “[M]ilitary history is not the most respected branch of historical inquiry in academic circles.”⁴³ There is an opinion among academic that to write about war is to approve of it and to glorify it. War is not glorious as any modern general can testify. General Robert E. Lee observed: “It is well that war is so terrible—we would grow to fond of it.”⁴⁴ Arthur Wellesly, Duke of Wellington stated: ‘Nothing except a battle lost can be half as melancholy as a battle won.’⁴⁵

Despite the objection of some of their colleagues, military historians today have publish a broad range of material based upon their political, ideological, and methodological interests as any other branch of history.⁴⁶ On fourth century Rome, there are more books and articles on the social and political aspects of the Roman military than there on wars, campaigns, and battles. This study helps bridge that gap.

Knowledge of military terminology is critical to understanding how the Nisibis War changed Roman military methodology. “Strategy” deals with the preparation for and the waging of war at the national level by kings and emperors. Historically, it has often been linked with the art of planning and directing campaigns. Today the “art of campaigning” is known as “operations.” “Tactics”, strategy’s partner, is the art of executing plans and handling troops in battle. Strategy is used herein with its modern connotation as the art of employing all the resources of an empire or kingdom to achieve

⁴² Richard W. Stewart, Ed. *American Military History, Volume I, 1775-1917* (Washington D.C.: U.S. Army Center of Military History, 2005), 1.

⁴³ Stephen Morillo and Michael F. Pavkovic, *What is Military History?* (Malden and Cambridge: Polity Press, 2006), 1.

⁴⁴ James Charlton, eds., *The Military Quotation Book* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2002), 95.

⁴⁵ James Charlton, eds., *The Military Quotation Book*, 125.

⁴⁶ Morillo, 1-9.

objectives in war or peace.⁴⁷ An empire may conduct offensive operations with its armies (attacking enemy cities, raiding into enemy territory etc.), but if its strategic objective is to maintain the status quo it is considered to be on the strategic defensive. If a kingdom conducts a defensive campaign against an empire's offensive operations but has the objective of recovering territory lost in previous wars or causing a regime change in an opponent's government, it is considered to be on the strategic offense. As Shapur and the various Roman emperors fought for control of Mesopotamia, tactical success did not necessarily develop into strategic success and tactical failure did not necessarily lead to strategic defeat.⁴⁸

In the fourth century, educated Romans spoke Greek and Latin but employing both transliterated terms in this work would be confusing. Technical terms and names where possible are in their Latin form or an English version: 'Constantine' rather than 'Konstantinos' and 'legion V Parthia' instead of 'legio V Parthica'. Persian and Greek names macrons on long vowels are not used herein.⁴⁹

To reconstruct the defensive system of Diocletian that Constantius inherited when his father Constantine assigned him to the Orient c. 335, a detailed analysis of relevant sections of the *Notitia Dignitatum* is provided and a situational template for 337 created. Templating is a modern military intelligence technique used to determine an enemy army's positions by studying its doctrine and historical methods of operations.⁵⁰ Once created, the template is adjusted for terrain and other factors into a situational template. Theorized enemy positions are plotted on a map and then are confirmed or denied with reconnaissance. In this case the recorded Roman deployment pattern c. 395 is applied to

⁴⁷ Richard W. Stewart, ed., *American Military History, Volume I, 1775-1917*, 12-13.

⁴⁸ Harry G. Summers, Jr., *On Strategy: The Vietnam War in Context* (Carlisle Barracks: US Army War College, 1982), 57.

⁴⁹ See John Haldon, *The Byzantine Wars* (Gloucestershire: The History Press, 2011), 7.

⁵⁰ Student Text 101-5, Command and Staff Decision Process, Fort Leavenworth Kansas: United States Army Command and General Staff College Publication, January 1994 excepts from Field Manuel 34-130. Intelligence Preparation of the Battlefield II-2-1 to 54.

the portion of Mesopotamia lost in the treaty of 363. Reconnaissance is provided by Ammianus, the *Notita Dignitatum* as well as nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first century archeological and historical field surveys.

This study starts with the peace of Nisibis, forced upon the Persians by Diocletian in 298. Like many wars, the Nisibis War (337-363), had its beginning in the forced peace of the previous war. A detailed understanding of the terrain, weather and economic factors of the Roman East and its interaction with Persia and Parthia is essential. After reviewing the Roman Eastern Theater of Operation, a summary of the perpetual conflict between Roman and Parthia/Persia ending in the treaty of Peace of 298 will set the stage for this study. Identification of the Roman leaders, their military structure and the factors that influenced Constantius' decision to adopt an apparently non-Roman defensive strategy against the Persians, follows the terrain analysis. Next is the examination of king Shapur and his Persian army. Like many wars, the Nisibis War, had its beginning in the forced peace of the previous war and the next section examines the secular, religious and military events that made the war inevitable.

The four phases of the war are then examined and analyzed in detail. The first phase considered is the period 337-350 where the Romans executed successfully an active defense wearing down the Persians in a war of attrition. Phase two, 351- 358, became a stalemate as Shapur was forced to defend his eastern border against the Huns and Constantius marched west to defeat a usurper. Phase three examines why the Romans were forced by circumstances to adopt a passive defense strategy relying exclusively on their eastern *limitanei* armies between 358-360 and how Shapur's maturity as a general, unhinged the Roman Mesopotamian defensive zone. The war's final phase, 362- 363, concludes with Julian's return to the traditional offensive strategy that led to his decisive defeat. The Conclusion summarizes the overall events that lead to the Roman defeat and the establishment of a new defensive strategy that protected the Empire's eastern provinces for the next three hundred years.

Chapter 2

Background of The Nisibis War

Rome and Parthia and then Persia had been at war off and on for five centuries prior to the outbreak of the Nisibis War in 336-7. During the Parthian period, with the exception of some spectacular Roman defeats, Rome dominated the wars, but could not turn victory in war into permanent territorial gain. The Parthian ineptness at siege warfare combined with incompetent logistics and internal dissention made long term occupation of raided Roman provinces unsuccessful.⁵¹ This changed with the rise of the first Persian King, Ardashirs I, who defeated his Parthian overlords and established the Sasanian Dynasty in 224.

Upon establishing dominance over other Parthian clans, Sasanian and Roman ambitions clashed. During the third century Rome, beset with internal civil wars and barbarian invasions, lost a series of wars with Persia. During these wars Roman Syria and Mesopotamia were overrun, several large armies were lost and an emperor was captured.⁵² Despite improved Persian military capacity in siege warfare, logistics and internal organization, no significant territorial gain by either side was realized until 296. In that year Caesar Galerius surprised Narses Persian army during a night attack near Satala Armenia and destroyed it.⁵³ The Romans destroyed the Persian army and captured king Nars' family. Narses, wounded, barely escaped with his life. With the Persian army destroyed Narses was unable to prevent Galerius from marching into the Persian homeland. Diocletian's war aims did not include the conquest of Persia and restrained Galerius from penetrating the Iranian Plateau. Diocletian viewed the victory at Satala as the termination of the conflict and did not advance further due to severely limited resources damaged by almost a century of conflict and civil wars.

⁵¹ Rose Mary Sheldon, *Rome's Wars In Parthia, Blood In The Sand*, 2-9, 231-249.

⁵² Farrokh (2004), *Shadows in the Desert*, 184-190, 194-197.

⁵³ The modern village of Sadak is in the province Gümüşhane, Turkey. MAVORS, Institute for Ancient Military History, http://www.mavors.org/en/projects_3.htm.

The root cause of the Nisibis War was the humiliating terms of the treaty imposed upon the Persians by the Romans in 298. The treaty no longer exists but is described in a commentary by Peter the Patrician (c. 500-564). The treaty established the Tigris River as Rome's new eastern boundary with the eastern Trans-Tigris regions of *Intilene* (a.k.a. *Ingilene*) *Sophene*, *Arzanene*, *Corduene* (a.k.a. *Cordyene*), and *Zabdicene* ceded to Roman control. The Tigris became the new border. The fort of Zintha, on the border of Media, became the bounty of Armenia. Iberian and Albanian kings received their authority from Rome. The city of Nisibis, ceded to Rome, became the main center for the silk and spice trade.⁵⁴ Bezabde was established as a fortified town to safeguard the newly acquired Trans-Tigris region.⁵⁵

Historian R.C. Blockley puts the treaty in perspective. It placed the Persian-occupied Armenian satrapies under Rome extending the Roman sphere of influence to Lake Van positioned to threaten Persian-controlled Adiabene. It provided for Roman possession of northern Mesopotamia and extended Armenia into Persian-held Adiadene confirming Roman suzerainty over Armenia. Additionally it recognized Roman suzerainty over Iberia and the strategically important east-west corridor between the Caspian and Black Seas south of the Caucasus Mountains. Finally it designated Nisibis as the sole location for trade between Persia and Rome and granted Rome the ability to monitor the movement of merchants.⁵⁶

The terms of the treaty imposed redress for Roman humiliation and losses endured at the hands of the Persians during the third century. However they humiliated King Narse in the eyes of his nobility, threatened his western territories, and barred the Persians from Armenia and Iberia. In the intervening years between the signing of the

⁵⁴ Dodgeon and Lieu, 133; Dignas and Winter, 122-130.

⁵⁵ C.S. Lightfoot, "The Site of Roman Besabde." 189-202, ed. Stephen Mitchell, *Armies and Frontiers in Roman and Byzantine Anatolia, Proceedings of a colloquium held at University College, Swansea, in April 1981* (Oxford: BAR International Series 156, 1983).

⁵⁶ R.C. Blockley, *East Roman Foreign Policy, Formation and Conduct from Diocletian to Anastasius* (Leeds: Francis Cains, 1992), 6.

treaty and Shapur's II majority (325), there was some unrest and raiding along the Roman-Persian frontier, but no outright breach of the treaty.⁵⁷

In 325, Shapur turned sixteen and assumed the responsibilities of the king of kings. He was obsessed with recovering the lost provinces but he was not reckless. Prior to Shapur's majority advisors and senior nobles guided the kingdom. While the humiliating Treaty of 298 burned in his mind, Shapur faced more pressing problems from Saracen inroads into Persian Mesopotamia. According to Arab historian al-Tabri (c. 839-923) Shapur attacked with 1,000 warriors and seized the coast of the Persian Gulf and Arabian Peninsula driving the Saracens back into the desert.⁵⁸

Shapur's Arab Wars were more complicated than a young warrior king leading 1,000 Sasanian knights into battle. While the details are elusive, al-Tabri's account describes not only land campaigns and ignores the amphibious operations. The Persian military forces subdued not only the desert Saracens but also the city-states and small Arab kingdoms on the Arabian Peninsula granting Persia control of the trading ports along the India Ocean except Roman Africa and Palestine. The evidence suggests that Shapur's 'Arab Solution' was part of an overall strategy to control the trade between Indian and Rome. Shapur's engineers built the 'Wall of Arabs' to keep the Saracens confined to the desert and to protect the settled Persian-Arab villages. This field fortification was a moat and wall that protected loyal Arab settlements from Hira to Bosra.⁵⁹ It is unclear whether this wall was a continuous barrier manned by Arab militias or a series of smaller walls and moats around individual villages. What is clear is that Shapur was interested in hydraulic civil and military engineering from an early age and as a young king he gathered advisors with diverse military skills.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Blockley (1992), 6-7.

⁵⁸ Al-Tari, *Annales*, ed., Barth, Noldeke, Trans, 290-291.

⁵⁹ Wolfram Kleiss, "Fortifications," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, 2012, <http://www.iranicaonline.org/>. Accessed October 14, 2012, 09:15.

⁶⁰ Shapur has a second bridge built across the Tigris at Cestophon to ease traffic congestion while still a boy. al-Tari, 290.



Map 1⁶¹

Shapur's Arab Wars were not unnoticed by Constantine. Despite limited documentation of this period, historian Irfan Shahid concludes that Shapur's wars altered the balance of power in Arab lands causing pressure along the Arabian *Limes* and the *via Diocletiana* as the Saracen Lakhmid and Tanukhid Tribes in Mesopotamia rebounded

⁶¹ Map adapted from Dignas and Winter, 198-199.

from the Persian offensives.⁶² This upheaval disrupted trade as evidenced by the alleged Persian pilferage of a gift from an Indian king sent to Constantine carried by the philosopher Metrodorus. This event is estimated to have occurred in 326 or 327 but was not, as Ammianus argues, a *casus belli* for Constantine to go to war against Persia ten years later. Instead of being goaded into war Constantine focused upon the establishment of his new capital at Constantinople and pacifying the Danube *Limes* from the Goths and Sarmatians, a task he completed in 334.⁶³

The incident demonstrates that Rome had economic and diplomatic interests in India during the fourth century. Shahid argues that Constantine pursued a vigorous trade policy in the 330s as he prepared for war against Persia.⁶⁴ This was the period when the Roman Red Sea ports of Berenike and Myos Hormos were expanding.⁶⁵ Based upon records of port activities, many skilled captains sailed between Roman Africa and India, propelled by Monsoon Winds and bypassing Persian controlled ports.

Rome's adoption of Christianity, created a religious aspect to the friction between the empires. Once Constantine defeated his last competitor, Licinius, in 324 he established Christianity as the 'de facto' religion of the Roman Empire. Constantine mandated Christianity as part of his foreign policy. In concluding treaties with the Goths in 332 and the Sarmatians in 334, he insisted on religious stipulations. Constantine assumed the role of protector and assumed the duty to convert pagans. These personal attitudes shaped his policy toward Persia and the Christians living under the domination of the Zoroastrian monarch Shapur.⁶⁶

⁶² Irfan Shahid, *Byzantium And The Arabs In The Fourth Century* (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 1984,2006), 66-68.

⁶³ Ibid., 68, fn 155.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 71-72.

⁶⁵ Roberta Tomber, *Indo-Roman Trade, From Pots To Pepper* (London: Duckworth, 2008), 62-64.

⁶⁶ T.D. Barnes, "Constantine and the Christians of Persia," *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 75 (1985), 126-136, 131. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/300656>.

Constantine wrote a personal letter, recorded by Eusebus, to Shapur during routine political discourse in 324. The letter was polite but proselytized Christianity. Shapur's response is unknown. The conversion of the kingdom of Iberia to Christianity around 330 and Constantine's foreign policy along the Danube would have troubled the Persians with their large Christian minority. Shapur would have been aware that, as a young officer, Constantine had marched with Galerius to Ctesiphon in 298. Shapur likely concluded that Constantine intended war on Persia once his other borders were pacified.⁶⁷ Before 337, with the exception of a brief period at the end of the third century, Christians had been tolerated in Persia. The result of Constantine's proselytizing was the creation of a perceived internal threat to the Persian monarchy that resulted in renewed persecution.⁶⁸

The traditional Roman imperial military strategy could be defined in modern terms as political high-intensity warfare. As historian Matyszak explains Rome was not interested in seizing strategic areas of real estate or disrupting lines of communication. Roman generals headed directly toward the enemy's governmental center intending to destroy the enemy's will to resist by capturing the capital and destroying en route the enemy force. The defeated nation or tribe would negotiate terms and a Roman civilian administrator or collaborator would be placed in charge.⁶⁹

This strategy as applied in the fourth century required a large, readily available army deployable at the emperor's personal command and explains the creation of the *comitatus* or elite central field army, despite criticism that it weakened the empire's defense. Bleckley asserts that Constantine's *comitatus* was an "...instrument of a policy that was militarily and politically aggressive, even expansionist."⁷⁰ Yet, Constantine only created a single field army and could not attack the Persians until the Danube region was

⁶⁷ Ibid., 132.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 136.

⁶⁹ Philip Matyszak, *Imperial General, The Remarkable Career Of Petellius Cerialis* (Barnsley: Pen & sword Books, Ltd., 2011), 42-43.

⁷⁰ Blockley, (1992), 9.

pacified.⁷¹ It was not until the mid-330s that he could turn his attention toward Persia. Believing an attack was eminent Shapur struck while Constantine was engaged along the Danube. Constantine sent his nineteen-year old son Constantius as Caesar to Antioch to guard the eastern frontier.⁷² In 336 a Persian army marched into Armenia and installed a Persian nominee to the throne. Constantine responded by planning an campaign with the religious overtones of a crusade that included for the first time in Roman history a contingent of Christian bishops.

From the limited evidence available Shahid theorizes that Constantine's campaign envisioned two armies striking into Persia. His plan entrusted Constantius to command the army at Antioch and his nephew Hannibalist to command the second army in Cappadocia . Constantine would take the field in person as commander-in-chief to direct operations. It appears his ultimate goal upon defeating Persia was to replace Shapur on the Persian throne with Hannibalianus.⁷³ Hannibalianus was the son of Constantine's half-brother Flavius Damatius Hannibalianus. Constantine elevated Hannibalianus to the thrones of Pontus and Armenia with the eventual intent of replacing Shapur. As Potter points out, this arrangement was unique. "No other previous emperor had made plans for succession that depended upon the occupation of new territory, or installation of a relative upon a foreign throne."⁷⁴

In Walter E. Kaegi's essay, based upon John Lydus sixth century summary of Constantine's and Cornelius' fourth century records, the Romans were planning a surprise attack on Persia in 337. Constantine's plan involved a two-prong attack with one army attacking through Armenia and a second army attacking through Mesopotamia.⁷⁵ As Historian A.D. Lee notes, advance warning of pending invasions always reached the

⁷¹ Cromwell, 5-12.

⁷² Constantius II was named Caesar on November 13, 324 at the age of seven.

⁷³ Shahid, 72.

⁷⁴ Potter, *The Roman Empire at Bay*, 460.

⁷⁵ W.E. Kaegi Jr., "Constantine's and Julian's Strategic Surprise Against the Persians," *Athenaeum*, Vol. 59, (1981), 209-213.

enemy. In this case the Persian response was to send an embassy to Constantinople with the aim of dissuading Constantine from his plan.⁷⁶

Julian explains in his oration “In Honor Of The Emperor Constantius” written c. 355, that when Constantius assumed command of the regional Army of the East c. 335 it was unprepared for war.⁷⁷ Training had been relaxed and recruitment had declined. Units were not fully manned and military supplies had not been stockpiled. Constantius recruited or drafted veterans’ sons of military age and implemented training and drill for the infantry. The cavalry was expanded with new *cataphracts* regiments. Supplies were stockpiled.⁷⁸

These preparations did not go unnoticed by the Persians. In 336 the Persian general Narses, possibly a brother of Shapur, stormed Amida and marched into Roman Mesopotamia. Constantius marched out with his regional army and defeated and killed Narses at the battle of Narasara.⁷⁹ He then marched on Amida and reoccupied and rebuilt it. The new fortifications included high walls and stout towers armed with artillery.⁸⁰

Rome’s war plans failed when Constantine fell ill in April 337 and died on May 22nd near Nicomedeia.⁸¹ According to historian Benjamin Isaac: ‘the mechanism of [Roman] decision-making was influenced primarily by the interests of the emperor in

⁷⁶ A.D. Lee, *Information & Frontiers, Roman Foreign Relations in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 113, 119.

⁷⁷ At this point the Army of the Orient was not a *comitatus* field army. See Cromwell, 5-12.

⁷⁸ Julian, “Oration I, “Panegyric In Honor Of The Emperor Constantius,” *The Works Of The Emperor Julian*, Vol. I Wilmer Cave Wright, trans., (London: Loeb Classical Library, 1913), 33; Dodgeon and Lieu, 152-162.

⁷⁹ Festus, *Breviarium* and Theophanes, *Chronographia*, translated in Dodgeon and Lieu, 154.

⁸⁰ AM, XVIII, 9.1, 73-75.

⁸¹ Barnes, T.D. “Constantine and the Christians of Persia,” *The Journal of Roman Studies*, Vol. 75 (1985), 126-136, 131. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/300656>. Accessed: 12 19:54 October 2011.

safeguarding his position and enhancing his glory...”⁸² Upon learning of his father’s sickness and death Constantius left Antioch to secure his succession to the throne and did not return until after the empire had been divided late in the year.⁸³ Constantius’ supporters killed Hannibalianus and other relatives who could have challenged Constantine’s sons’ right to the throne. Reaching the Balkans, Constantius and his two brothers, Constantine II and Constans, divided the empire in September 337.⁸⁴ During Constantius’ absence the Armenians revolted.⁸⁵ Shapur took advantage of the situation, and with his army massed earlier to oppose the Roman invasion, marched on Nisibis and besieged it possibly as early as May 337 but at least by mid-summer, 337.⁸⁶ A twenty-five year war followed.

⁸² Isaac, 416.

⁸³ Barnes (1985), 133.

⁸⁴ T.D. Barnes, “Imperial Chronology, A. D. 337-350,” *Phoenix*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (Summer, 1980), 125-166, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1087874>. Accessed July 3, 2012, 20:12; T.D. Barnes, 160-166,

⁸⁵ Dodgeon and Lieu, 165.

⁸⁶ Barnes (1985), 133. In the alternative, these events took place in 338.

Chapter 3
The Military Aspects of the Geography
Climate and Weather of the Roman East

“The nature of the ground is often of more consequence than courage.”⁸⁷

The Treaty of 298 forced a geopolitical disaster upon the Persians. Most historians fail to recognize that the terms of the treaty handed the Romans two daggers pointed at the heart Persia.⁸⁸ A portion of Media was attached to Armenia, five regions were torn from Persia; the kingdoms of Iberia and Albania were added to the Roman sphere of influence; and the Tigris was established as the new boundary between Rome and Persia. Persia’s northern and western frontiers were vulnerable to Roman assault. Roman armies were stationed at the very edge of the Iranian plateau, within ‘a fortnight’s march’ of the Persian heartland.⁸⁹ The theater of operations of the Nisibis War stretched from the Caucasus Mountains and the Caspian Sea in the north to the Indian Ocean in the south and from Antioch on the Mediterranean Sea east to the fortified oasis city of Merv. This theater encompassed scorching deserts, fertile steppes, river valleys and desolate alpine passes.⁹⁰ An examination of the geopolitical factors within the Tigris-Euphrates Valley is critical since the majority of military operations occurred there. The terrain and weather in the Tigris-Euphrates Valley or Mesopotamia was far different than the Mediterranean climate prevalent in the province of Syria and the major centers of Greco-Roman civilization. The climate of the Tigris-Euphrates Valley, as described by primary sources in the fourth century, was similar to its current climate. The climate within the

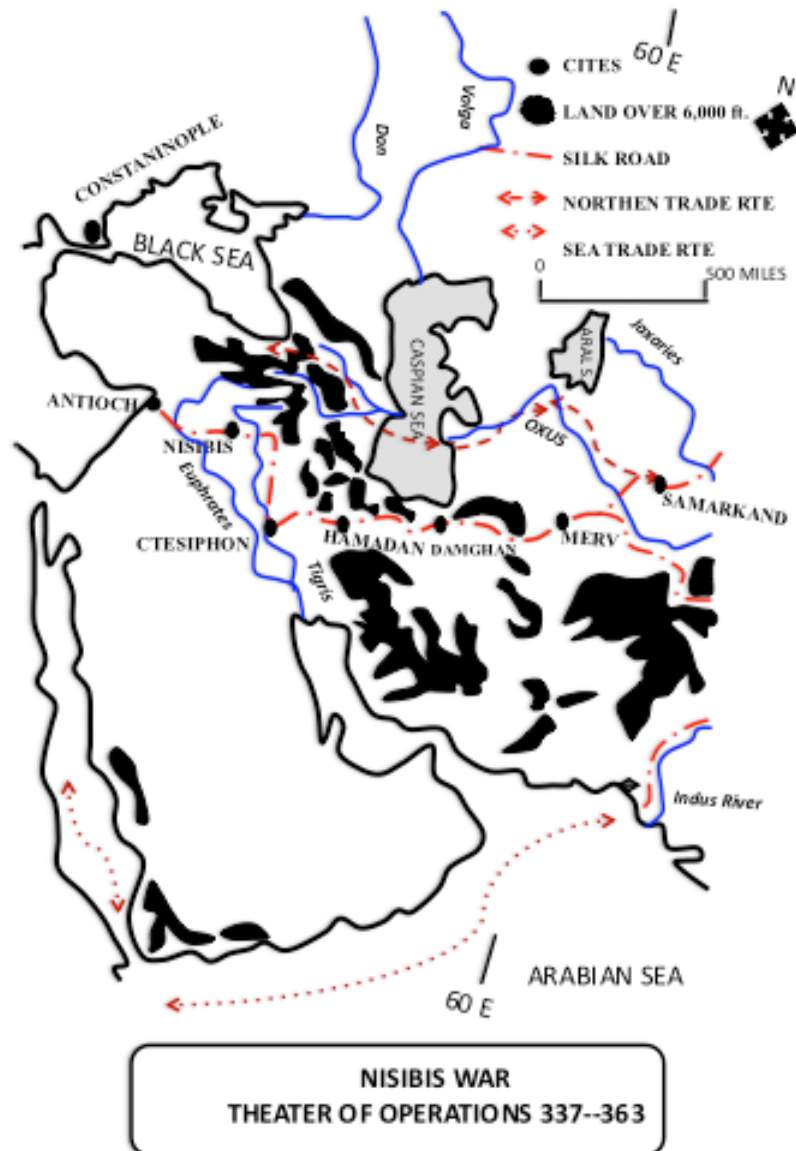
⁸⁷ Vegetius, 48.

⁸⁸ Farrok (2007), 198-207.

⁸⁹ Rawlinson, 41.

⁹⁰ A.D. Lee. *Information & Frontiers, Roman Foreign Relations In Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 49

Valley itself differed significantly from that in the city of Nisibis in the north to the city of Ctesiphon in the south.



Map 2⁹¹

In the northern end of the Valley lies the Mesopotamian Plain, bound on the north by the Taurus Mountains, on the south by the Sangara Ridge, on the east by the Tigris River and

⁹¹ Map adapted from Dignas and Winter, 198-199; and Talbert, 3,4, 5, 6, 67, 69, 68, 71, 86-99.

on the west by the Euphrates River. This region, basically the Roman Provinces of Mesopotamia and Osroene received sufficient rainfall for dry farming and wild grass that survived the summer dry season. The central and southern portions of the Valley required irrigation, and those areas that were not irrigated remained desert. The daily high temperature in the middle and southern parts of the Valley reached 120°F in June 2010 and, based upon Ammianus' account, the temperature in 363 was equally debilitating. The harvest in the upper, middle, and lower Valley, then and now, takes place in June.⁹² The harvest in the eastern Mediterranean region was earlier than the Tigris-Euphrates Valley. Legumes such as lentils are harvested in April and May, barley in April, wheat in May and chickpeas as late as June. The campaign season for northern Mesopotamia was from March to October. The winter season, November to March subjects the region to heavy rains and freezing temperatures that are also common as far south as the modern city of Mosul. Campaigns normally started in the spring and ended at the onset of winter, normally in November.⁹³

The Sasanian Empire was a highland empire with the Iranian Plateau as its center of gravity. These mountainous regions, particularly the mountain spine of the Zagros, provided Shapur with manpower, horses, and other vital resources.⁹⁴ The key to decisively defeating Persia was penetrating the Iranian plateau. The same passes used by the merchants of the Silk Road during the summer became impassible during the winter months increasing the effectiveness of the Zagros Mountain as natural fortification. The map of Persia is deceptive. A large part of the center of the empire was desert. The Persian heartland followed the Zagros Mountains northwest to the vicinity of the city of Hamadan, turning east along the forested shores of the Caspian Sea and the Elburz Mountains. The central part of the empire was arid desert with pockets of habitation

⁹² Donald W. Engels, *Alexander the Great and the Logistics of the Macedonian Army* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 67-68; Geofferey Greatrex, *Rome and Persia At War, 502-532* (Leeds: Francis Carina Ltd., 1998), 19-21.

⁹³ Lee, (1993) 91-92.

⁹⁴ James Howard-Johnson, "The Two Great Powers in Late Antiquity." 157-226, 189, ed. Jan William Drijvers, *The Late Roman World And Its Historian, Interpreting Ammianus Marcellinus* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

where water was available. The eastern boarder stretched from the grasslands of Gurgan abutting the mountains of Khurasan to the deserts to the southeast.⁹⁵

One of the four Great Fire Temples of Zoroastrianism was located at Takht-I Sulsimun in Atroaten (a.k.a. Media and modern Iranian Azerbaijan) where the Persian heartland turned east. This was an important religious site with a fire temple built at the site in Achaemenian times. It remained an important religious site throughout the Parthian and Sasanian periods. The crusading Roman army of Emperor Heraclius destroyed it in 624.⁹⁶

Three main trade routes from the Roman Empire lay open to the Far East. The most dangerous northern route started at the Black Sea, headed east through the river valleys of the Caucasian country, across the Caspian Sea, up the Oxus River into China or India. This route avoided Parthian and Persian controlled territory. The second route started at Roman controlled Nisibis and followed the Tigris River down to Ctesiphon crossing Persia toward China or India. The southern route was by sea, beginning at Roman Egyptian Red Sea ports following the Monsoon wind pattern to India and back.⁹⁷

Historian M.P. Charlesworth argues that during the Parthian period, Roman operations in Iberia, Albania, and eastern Armenia were not aimed at defending against Parthian raids, but rather to secure the northern trade route. This northern trade route circumvented Parthian controlled territory. Trade along this route followed the Oxus River west, crossed the Caspian Sea, and then continued west up the Araxes River. Charlesworth argues based upon Tacitus, that the Roman General Corbulo utilized the Araxes River, Caspian Sea, and Cyrus River as supply lines during his first century campaign. While the Araxes Valley suffered some Parthian raids, the Cyrus River and Oxus River route to Samarkand were never threatened by Parthian or Persian domination. During antiquity the Oxus River (modern Amur River) emptied into the Caspian not the

⁹⁵ James Howard-Johnson (1995), 180-181.

⁹⁶ James Howard-Johnson (1999), 'Heraclius' Persian Campaigns And The Revival Of The Eastern Roman Empire," *War In History*, Vol. 6, 1991, 1-44, 17.

⁹⁷ Charlesworth, 58.

Aral Sea.⁹⁸ Charlesworth argues that first and second century Romans secured this region west of the Caspian Sea due to its value as a trade route.⁹⁹

The central route was the Silk Road passing through the Persian heartland. From Ctesiphon, the route climbed the Zagros Mountains via the Diyala River to the Iranian Plateau and continued passed the great rock at Behistun to Ecbatana. The route continued though the cities of Hamadan and Damghan east to Merv. At this point the route split into a southern route leading to Alexandropolis (modern Kandahur) and a northern alternative through Bactra that eventually arrived at the “stone tower” where the Chinese merchants were met.¹⁰⁰

The Indian Ocean was the third route that bypassed Parthia/Persia. Despite Shapur’s control of Arabian Peninsula ports, Roman-Indian trade flourished during the fourth century thanks to Monsoons that enabled shipping to bypass the Persian ports. The Greek sea captain Hippalus discovered the Monsoon wind pattern during the first century. Ships departing Egypt in July reached India in September by sailing directly across the Indian Ocean without entering a Parthian or Persian Port. They returned by sailing west in November landing at a Roman Red Sea port, and arriving in Egypt in February.¹⁰¹ The deep sea Monsoon route to India did not preclude local coastal trade routes. Silks and other products from China and Southeast Asia continued to arrive at Roman provinces via these routes as well.¹⁰² The routes that utilized Persian ports or

⁹⁸ The Oxus River changed course in the late thirteenth century. Ernst Herzfeld, *Zoroaster and His World*, Vol.II (1947). Cited in Sylvia Volk’s internet page *Page of Asiain* “The Course of the Oxus River,” <http://www.iras.ucalgary.ca/~volk/sylvia/Asia.htm>. Accessed August 15, 2012, 15:00.

⁹⁹ M.P. Charlesworth, *Trade-Routes And Commerce Of The Roman Empire*. (London: Cambridge University Press, 1924), 104-109.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.,102-103.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 60.

¹⁰² Ibid., 67-71.

crossed Persia converged at Ctesiphon and then flowed up the Tigris to Nisibis were subject to a hefty Persian tariff and could be easily interdicted during wartime.¹⁰³

While little is known about the northern route it was important to Rome because it bypassed Parthia and Persia. During the first and second century Roman emperors campaigned to gain control of Iberia and Albania through which the northern route ran.¹⁰⁴ During the late third century Persia campaigned in the region and brought the kingdoms of Iberia and Albania within its sphere of influence, cutting off Roman trade along this northern route. The Treaty of 298 returned Iberia and Albania to the Roman sphere of influence supporting a conclusion that Diocletian, or someone at his court, wanted to re-establish Roman dominance of this route. The eastern part of this route skirted Persian territory following the Oxus River, through the territory of King Grumbates of the *Chionite* (A tribe of Huns).¹⁰⁵ Michael Loewe contends that Roman merchants used this route to avoid the consequences of travelling through Persia.¹⁰⁶ It is reasonable that these trade considerations would have influenced foreign policy in the fourth century and explains why the Indian Ocean once again became a Roman interest.

Since the discovery of the Monsoon wind pattern during the first century, Roman trade with Indian was brisk. Rome had extensive economic ties with the kingdoms along the Indus River and west coast of India.¹⁰⁷ Trade flushed during the second century but

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 101-111.

¹⁰⁵ Wolfgang Felix, "Chionites," *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, Vol. V, Fasc.5, 485-487, 2012 <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/chionites-lat>. Accessed June 18, 2012, 13:30.

¹⁰⁶ Michael Loewe. "Spices and Silk: Aspects of World Trade in the First Seven Centuries of the Christian Era." *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, No. 2 (1971), 166-179. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2503290>. Accessed June 18, 2012, 21:15.

¹⁰⁷ John Thorley, "The Roman Empire and the Kushans," *Greece & Rome*, Second Series, Vol. 26, No. 2 (Oct., 1979), 181-190, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/642511>. Accessed June 18, 2012, 21:15; C. Margabandhu, "Trade Contacts between Western India and the Graeco-Roman World in the Early Centuries of the Christian Era," *Journal of Economic and Social History of the Orient*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (Dec., 1965), 316-322, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3596384>. Accessed June 18, 2012, 21:15.

suffered during the third century crisis. Stability during the early and middle fourth century resulted in the resurgence of Indian Ocean maritime trade. In the middle of the fourth century the Roman Red Sea port of *Berenike* expanded operations linking Indian Ocean trade with Egyptian markets via caravan routes.¹⁰⁸ Roman and Indian ships bypassed Persian ports excluding the Persian middlemen and evading revenue collection. The Nisbis War interfered with merchant traffic along the Silk Road and Persian merchants took to the Indian Ocean to compete with Romans in the Indian markets.¹⁰⁹

Prior to the Treaty of 298 Rome routinely used these three trade routes. Two of these trade routes provided access to and overlapped potential invasion routes. the northern route, and the central Silk Road were not controlled by Rome. After the Treaty of 298 the border and the parties' spheres of influence shifted and Rome acquired control of access of the northern route which threatened the central Silk Road. Rome also acquired access to a third route that had not been used for trade but was suitable for an invasion route.

The first and most northern invasion route followed the Araxes River, ran through the kingdoms of Iberia and Albania (modern Georgia) and into the Persian heartland. The Roman General Corbulo campaigned in this region during his first century.

The second route was a fourteen-day march from Bezabde across the Tigris River, then across the Greater Zab and through the Zagros Mountain passes into the vicinity of the Fire Temple at Takht-I Sulsimun in Atrochene. Another 'fortnight' march would have brought a Roman army to Hamadan, the hub of the Silk Road. This route in reverse was used by Heraclius to invade Persian Mesopotamia from the Persian heartland.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁸ Steven E. Sidebotham, "Late Roman Berenike," *Journal of American Research Center in Egypt*, Vol. 39 (2002), 217-240, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40001157>. Accessed June 16, 2012, 13:00.

¹⁰⁹ Touraj Daryaee, "The Persian Gulf Trade in Late Antiquity," *Journal of World History*, Vol. 14, No. 1 (Mar., 2003), 1-16, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20079006>. Accessed June 20, 2010, 21:27.

¹¹⁰ Howard-Johnson (1999), 16-27; A.D. Lee, *Information & Frontiers, Roman Foreign Relations In Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 94-95.

The third route required the Roman army to take Ctesiphon before marching along the Silk Road (which followed the Diyala River) through the Zagros passes in order to attack Hamaden. This route was weather dependent since the passes were blocked by snow until as late as June.¹¹¹



Map 3¹¹²

¹¹¹ British Naval Intelligence Division, *Persia*, (Geographic Handbook Series, September 1945. [Declassified]), 544.

¹¹² Map adapted from Dignas and Winter, 198-199; and Talbert, 3,4, 5, 6, 67, 69, 68, 71, 86-99.

The third invasion route had two branches into Persian Mesopotamia that followed the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers. In 363 the Euphrates avenue of approach was defended by a series of island city fortresses, supported by the heavily fortified city of Peroz-Shapur, downstream from the major canal intake that linked both rivers.¹¹³ The second invasion route followed the Tigris. Little is known about fortifications along this route. On the eastern bank of the Tigris, the intersecting rivers of the Great Zab, Lesser Zab, Adheim, and Diyala formed natural defensive barriers. The west bank was primarily desert. During the Roman Emperor Heraclius' 627 Campaign the Lesser Zab had fortifications defending its four bridges and was probably defended in the fourth century as well.¹¹⁴ The Euphrates River was fed by the melting snow packs on the Anatolian plateau. The melting snow on the Anatolian plateau and Zargos Mountains fed the Tigris.¹¹⁵

Both avenues of approach led to the key city of Ctesiphon. Ctesiphon was the Persian imperial capital and was one of the great cities of Late Antiquity. Ctesiphon's importance was due to its being the main distribution center for the overland spice and silk route and sea trade with China and India.¹¹⁶ Today, the ruins of this great metropolis lie 20 miles southeast of modern Baghdad and comprise 18.7 square miles. Fourth century Rome was only 8.5 square miles.¹¹⁷ Ctesiphon was originally one huge city. It is unclear when, but sometime prior to the fourth century, the Tigris jumped its banks, shifted east, and divided the city. Ctesiphon was actually two fortified cities at the time

¹¹³ James Howard-Johnson. "The Two Great Powers in Late Antiquity." 157-226, 189, ed. Jan William Drijvers, *The Late Roman World And Its Historian, Interpreting Ammianus Marcellinus* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999); and AM, XXIV.2.9-22, 413-421.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 190.

¹¹⁵ John Matthews. *The Roman Empire of Ammianus* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1989), 151-155.

¹¹⁶ J. Innes Miller, *The Spice Trade Of The Roman Empire, 29 B.C. to A.D. 641* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 120-123, 132, 176-177, 238, 239.

¹¹⁷ Fourth century Ctesiphon was 30 square kilometers while Rome was 13.7 square kilometers.

of the Nisibis War; Ctesiphon on the east bank and Coche on the west bank.¹¹⁸ The configuration of the Tigris combined with challenging regional conditions such as canals, flooding, swamps, insects, extreme humidity, and scorching heat made capturing Ctesiphon a complicated military problem in fourth century.¹¹⁹ Despite these obstacles the city was captured four times in the second and third centuries and was last threatened by the Romans when the crusading army of Emperor Heraclius surrounded it in 627.¹²⁰

¹¹⁸ Matthews, 148-159.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 150-158.

¹²⁰ Ctesiphon was taken by Trajan in 116; Avidius Cassius in 164; Septimus Severus in 197; and Carus in 283. See generally, Sheldon (2010) , *Rome's Wars In Parthia*.

Chapter 4

The Mid-Fourth Century Roman Army and The Strategic Defense of the East

From the third century on, the Roman Army faced a variety of threats and was constantly at war along its long frontier or within its borders. In the east Rome faced the large conventional army of Sasanian Persia capable of raiding, launching full-scale invasions of conquest and siege warfare. Along the Rhine-Danube *Limes*, barbarians of various origins, ranging from small war bands to large tribal confederations threatened penetration of Roman defenses and engaged in hit and run raids. Saracen (Arab) tribes harassed the trade routes of the East, and North African tribes harried Egypt and Rome's other African provinces. The Roman Army itself posed a threat as it supported usurpers and contenders for the throne. Finally, the *Bagundae*, small bands of insurgents or bandits, terrorized civilian populations and occasionally grew strong enough to form a sizable force to offer open battle with the Roman Army.¹²¹

The defensive system that Diocletian implemented, and finalized by Constantine, differed from the Servian system by the creation of a two-tiered military force: the *Comitatensei* and the lower and less prestigious tier *Limitanei*. 'Limitanei' was the general term for all units along the *limes* (border).¹²² All *limitanei* regiments that formed the frontier armies were descendants of the Roman Army of *Principate*, and were tasked with the mission of defending the *limes* from fortified cities, fortresses, and forts.¹²³ The *comitatensei* were originally created from detachments of the old Roman Army. The *comitatensei* regiments were stationed in the provincial interiors with the strategic

¹²¹ R. Van Nort, *The Battle of Adrianople and the Military Doctrine of Vegetius*. Ph.D. dissertation, City University of New York, United States -- New York. Retrieved August 25, 2011, from Dissertations & Theses: The Humanities and Social Sciences Collection.(Publication No. AAT 3283191), 105-106.

¹²² The term *ripenses* was used for the higher-grade frontier unit (legions, equites, cunei and equitum). Pat Southern & Karen R. Dixon, *The Late Roman Army* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1996) 36; Cod. Th. 7.1.18; and Potter, *The Roman Empire At Bay, A.D. 180-395*, 451.

¹²³ Southern and Dixon (1996), 36-37.

mission to intercept border incursions or invasions that the *limitanei* could not defeat or control.¹²⁴ Two other types of units are referenced in historical sources. The *Scholae* regiments were guard units created by Constantine after the Praetorian Guard was disbanded. They were the personal guards of the emperor. Finally, there was the *Protectores Domestici*. This special regiment was partly guard regiment, officer candidate school and staff college, that provided staff officers for the various armies.

An informal *praesental* (in the presence of the emperor) army of *scholae* and *comitaensian* regiments was attached to the court.¹²⁵ In 364 the empire's massed *praesental* army for the Persian war was estimated by Cromwell to contain 137 regiments with a paper strength of between 90-100,000 men, but may have been reduced by losses in the Nisibis War to 30,000.¹²⁶ In March 363 sources arguably indicate Julian's *praesental* army mustered 85-95,000 men. Constantine's massed *praesental* army in 337 could have matched Julian's army and may have been larger.¹²⁷

Under Constantine the command and control of the *praesental* army was simple. He commanded the army and was assisted by a *Magister Peditum* (master or field marshal of infantry) and a *Magister Equitum* (master or field marshal of cavalry) with dukes commanding the *limitanei* units in their provinces. After Constantine's death the empire and *praesental* army was divided amongst his three sons. While there are no sources detailing the split of the army an even split would have provided the three co-

¹²⁴ The designation *Palatini* did not appear until after 365. The *Pseudocomitatensei* regiments, which were *Limitanei* units attached to a field army. The term first appears after Roman fortresses of Mesopotamia were ceded to Persia in 363 and the displaced *limitanei* were seconded to the field army. Cromwell, 31-33.

¹²⁵ Cromwell, 31-33; and Potter, 457.

¹²⁶ Cromwell estimates the army contained 64 comitatensian legions, six *scholae* (bodyguards), 36 cavalry and 31 *auxilia* regiments. The legions are estimated as 1000 men and all other regiments as 500. At Naissus in the summer of 364 this army may only have mustered 30,000 men before the division of the empire between Valentinian I and his brother Valens. Cromwell, 11, 18-19. Potter estimates the total for the for the *comitatus* armies spring 363 as 120,000 men. Potter, 455-459.

¹²⁷ Nicasie, 204.

emperors with approximately 30-40,000 men each.¹²⁸

Constantius' share of the empire included not only the East, but the region of Thrace as well. Both fronts were at war and Constantius could not be in both places at once and he did not want to detach his *magister peditum or equitum* from his *praesental* army.¹²⁹ His solution was to create the position of *comites rei militaris* (military counts) who commanded small regional *comitatus* field armies (hereafter field army(ies)) detached from the *praesental* army. The military counts were generals in their own right and were normally given commands of limited duration. Count Lucillianus commanded Nisibis during the 350 siege while Count Aelianus commanded a small army to reinforce Amida and took command of its defense upon his arrival in 359.¹³⁰ There were exceptions to limited term commands of the military counts such as the count Constantius placed in command of Thrace and the count commanding the *limitis Aegypt* (Egypt).¹³¹

Two generals were normally placed in command of large operations. While in theory the lines of seniority and command responsibility appear clear in execution they were modified by the character and temperament of the individuals involved. In 357 Barbatio, the *magistro peditum* commanding an army of 25,000 men and Caesar Julian commanding 13,000 men failed to cooperate in a joint operation against the Alamanni.¹³² Sabinianus' failure to cooperate with Ursicinus was one of the primary causes of the Roman defeat in 359.¹³³ Despite these notable failures due to the violation of the principle of unity of command, the Roman system of appointing two commanders of

¹²⁸ Cromwell, 13-15.

¹²⁹ At the time Arbiter was Constantius' *magister equitum*. Potter, 481.

¹³⁰ Zosimus as translated in Dodgeon and Lieu, 203; and AM, XVIII, 9.1-4, 463-467.

¹³¹ The compilation '*notitia dignitatum*,' <http://members.ozemail.com.au/~igmaier/webnotve.htm>. Accessed September 10, 2012, 09:00.

¹³² Gray A. Crump, *Ammianus as a Military Historian* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag GMBH, 1975), 85.

¹³³ AM, XIX, 3.1-3, 483, 485.

large armies when the emperor was not present did not normally distract from military operations.

The Roman field armies evolved from the third century and early fourth century chaos of Persian and Germanic invasion and civil war. Full ten cohort legions (hereafter antique legions) could not be withdrawn from the *limes*, so detachments known as *vexillationes* (hereafter detachments) were sent to reinforce the threatened region.¹³⁴ Historian H.M.D. Parker theorizes that in the army of Constantine and his successors a legion *comitatensis* numbered about 1,000 men and was commanded by a tribune. Such legions began as detachments from antique legions.¹³⁵

The creation of some *comitatus* regiments can be traced, if not accurately dated. A case in point was the Legion III *Diocletiana* (Diocletian). Starting life as an antique legion during Diocletian's reign and stationed in Egypt, the *Notitia*, lists III Diocletian under the command of *Comes limit Aegypt*, an *Equites promoti indigenae* legion III (tertia) Diocletian, a legion III (tertia) Diocletian under the command of the Duke Thebaidos and a legion III (Tertia) Diocletian Thaeorum under the command of the *Magister Militum per Thracis*.¹³⁶ It appears that these units were created as detachments from the antique legion III Diocletian and never returned to their parent organization.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ A 'vexillation' initially was a legionary detachment. In the fourth century some cavalry regiments in the field army were named *vexillationes* after their regimental standard. In this paper detachment will be used for infantry and *vexillation* will be used for cavalry when required. Cromwell, 71.

¹³⁵ Parker, 148. Either two standard cohorts (Cohorts II-X) or one double cohort (Cohort I).

¹³⁶ The compilation '*notitia dignitatum*,' <http://members.ozemail.com.au/~igmaier/webnotve.htm>.

¹³⁷ The alternative theory argued by Donald O' Reilly is that the European legion in Thrace was the remains of Saint Mauricius' Theban Legion of Christians, sent to Gaul as a full antique legion in 286. Both theories could be correct. Four legions, (I Maximiana Thebeorum, II Flavia Constantia Thebeorum, III Diocletiana Thebeorum and I Flavia Constantia (originally named IV Galeriana Thebeorum) are recorded with the title 'Thebeorum.' St. Mauricius' legion could have been any of these legions. See Donald O'Reilly, *Lost Legion Rediscovered, The Mystery of the Theban Legion* (Barnsely: Pen & Sword Military Books Ltd., 2011),xiv-xv, 128-145.

The Roman Army of the fourth century required between 15,000-30,000 new recruits yearly, depending on whether its total strength was 300,000 or 600,000.¹³⁸ The two main sources of recruits from inside the empire came from volunteers and conscripts.¹³⁹ The typical Roman soldier was conscripted in his early twenties and was by law 5'10"¹⁴⁰ usually from a rural area and was often the son of a veteran. Vegetius reported that traditionally peasants made better recruits than city dwellers because they were accustomed to hard labor.¹⁴¹ Despite the fact that Christianity was the dominant religion of the Roman government the majority of Roman soldiers were not Christian.¹⁴²

Recruits were to be in good health and not fully enrolled (branded) in the army until they were found fit for military service.¹⁴³ Veterans' sons were required to serve but not necessarily in the same unit as their father.¹⁴⁴ The Abinnaeus Archive indicates that the civilian populations were aware that men conscripted into *limitanei* units might remain in their home province.¹⁴⁵ Sons of veterans, if they enlisted with a horse, were allowed to join the cavalry.¹⁴⁶

¹³⁸ Treadgold, 43-86; and Southern and Dixon (1996), 67-75.

¹³⁹ Elton (1997), 128-134; and Southern and Dixon (1996), 67-75.

¹⁴⁰ This requirement was lowered to 5'7" Roman Feet in 367. Clyde Pharr, Trns. *The Theodosian Code and Novels and Sirmondian Constitutions* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 1952, 170; and Jones, 616. A Roman foot is 0.971 feet or 296 mm . A Roman mile was 0.919 standard miles or 1.48 km. Sir William Smith, *A New Classical Dictionary of Greek and Roman Biography, Mythology and Geography* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1851), Tables, 1024-1030.

¹⁴¹ Vegetius, 23; and Southern and Dixon (1996), 67-75.

¹⁴² A.D. Lee, *War In Late Antiquity, A Social History* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 176-187, 193-211.

¹⁴³ Vegetius, 23-24.

¹⁴⁴ Isaac, 145.

¹⁴⁵ Abinnaeus, 16-17, 61-65.

¹⁴⁶ Theodosian Code, 157, 183.

Men from outside the empire could join the army as individual volunteers, be conscripted as part of a treaty, or recruited from prisoners of war. While the majority of barbarians serving in the Roman Army were Germanic, all barbarian groups provided recruits. The majority of barbarian volunteers were attracted to the life style of a Roman soldier, which would have been luxurious compared to their tribal home. These individual volunteers would have been absorbed into the society of their regiment learning, Latin and becoming completely assimilated, often forgetting their native tongue.¹⁴⁷ Laws against military service evasion and prohibitions against pacifist churchmen opposing conscription should not be used to support the conclusion that most of the population were against military service in the east.¹⁴⁸ A large number of the eastern units on the *Notitia* are listed as indigenous (*indigenae*).

To face a herd of charging armored elephants with only an eight-foot spear, a three-foot sword, shield, and a handful of darts required a brave man. The Romans recognized that “[f]ew men are born brave; many become so through care and force of discipline.”¹⁴⁹ The Roman method of war recognized that only training, discipline and teamwork would ensure victory.¹⁵⁰ It took time to turn a recruit into a soldier and sending untrained troops into battle was to waste their lives.¹⁵¹ The “Achilles’ heel” of the Roman Army was the time it took to replace battle casualties. Heavy casualties normally equated to a proportionally high loss of veteran leadership of a unit which contemporary historians record as the number of tribunes (regimental commanders) lost in combat.¹⁵² It required two years to train a newly formed unit for battle.¹⁵³ It took twenty years to train a

¹⁴⁷ Jones, 620-623; and Southern and Dixon (1996), 67-75.

¹⁴⁸ Southern and Dixon (1996), 67-68.

¹⁴⁹ Vegetius, 48.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 22-26.

¹⁵¹ Luttwak (2009), 285.

¹⁵² Zosimus, 89; AM XXV, 5.1-4.

¹⁵³ Luttwack, (2009), 285.

tribune. A shortage of veteran leaders equated to lower standards and indiscipline. As will be seen, Roman indiscipline during the pursuit of defeated Persians forces on two occasions turned a Roman tactical victory into a bloody operational draw or strategic defeat.

In the Late Roman Army, only men in the staff corps, regimental commanders and higher would be commissioned on the emperor's authority. Today this rank is referred to as "field grade"; officers in the ranks of major, lieutenant colonel, colonel and general. Roman non-commissioned officers performed the function of modern junior officers. *Ducenarius* and *centurions* were the equivalent of modern company commanders. They were given independent commands, such as escorting foreign dignitaries to the court of the emperor. In the fourth century officers could be appointed from the ranks, or through patronage, into a the *protectores domesticus* in service to the emperor.¹⁵⁴ In this corps the potential regimental commanders were trained and tested to determine whether they were fit to command. Regimental commanders were called *tribuni* (tribunes), *prefects* or *praetoresiti*. The title "tribune" was also used for army staff officers (*tribuni vacates*). Many *tribuni vacates*, like Ammianus, were attached to generals like Ursicinus to serve in the field. In 357, the Emperor Valentinianus I (321-375) was promoted from the staff regiment to command a *comitatenses* cavalry regiment at age 36. Flavius Abinnaeus, spent 33 years in *limitanei* cavalry regiments rising to the rank of *ducenarius* when posted to the staff corps at 51.¹⁵⁵ After serving twenty-eight years in the *Palatinai* Legion *Ioviani* Flavius Memorius was elevated to *Protector Domesticus*, where he served for six years, before he was appointed *Prefect* of the *Comitatenses Legion Lanciarii Seniores*. He must have been 55 when appointed *prefect*. After three years as prefect he served five years as a count, first as *comes ripae* and then *comes Mauretania*.¹⁵⁶ The evidence indicates that successful, experienced soldiers could achieve appointment to regimental command, regardless of the status of their regiment. Also, heavy casualties could reduce

¹⁵⁴ Some authorities argue that this organization was one regiment and while others list it as two: *protectores* and *domesticus*.

¹⁵⁵ Jones, 637-639.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 639.

the available experienced manpower pool required to provide competent legion and regimental commanders and reduce the training and discipline level of newly formed and rebuilt units.

The ‘marching camp’ continued to constitute a critical aspect of Roman tactics into the fourth century but sources hint at significant changes in the establishment of such a camp form the first, second and third century model. The Emperor Maurice’s Field Manuel *Strategikon* (582-602) recommends a safety ditch, caltrops, defensive ditch, and wall made from the army’s supply wagons instead of the former traditional ditch, turf wall, and wooden palisade.¹⁵⁷ This different configuration would prevent a surprise cavalry and elephant attack into a Roman camp and compensate for the lack of wood in the Tigris and Euphrates Valley. As early as Julian’s expedition (363), the Roman Army was adapting their marching camp to the conditions of Mesopotamia by using shields and wagons instead of a wooden palisade.¹⁵⁸

Legions were the primary eastern infantry regiments until after 363 while *auxilia* regiments were an important element of western armies. Both eastern *comitatenses* and *limitanei* legions and their third century ancestors included archers and skirmishers along with their traditional infantry armed with body armor, large shield, sword, and various types of spears, javelins and darts. The early third century funeral monuments of II Parthia depict a skirmisher (*lanchiarii*) with bundles of javelins, an archer (*sagittarius legionis*), an artilleryman (*scorpio*), and a close-formation trainee (*discens phalangarius*).¹⁵⁹ In a papyrus pay record from c. 300, a full 20% (878-899 out of 5,000) of III Trajan in Egypt was composed of *lanchiarii*.¹⁶⁰ Vegetius’ recommendation that

¹⁵⁷ The safety ditch was to keep men and animals out of the caltrop field. *Strategikon*, 164. A caltrop is a four point spike designed so that when thrown on the ground one spike always points up. A horse or elephant that steps on one becomes disabled.

¹⁵⁸ Zosimus, 89.

¹⁵⁹ J.C.N. Coulston, “How to Arm a Roman Soldier.” 167-190, ed. Michel Austin, Jill Harries and Christopher Smith. *Modus Operandi, Essays In Honor of Geoffrey Richman* (London: University of London 1998), 167-190, 178-179.

¹⁶⁰ Jones, Vol. II fn. 31, 1257-1258; and Terence Coello. *Unit Sizes in the Late Roman Army* (Oxford UK:BAR International Series 645, 1996), 2-10.

recruits be trained in archery may have compensated for the lack of archer (*Sagittarius*) regiments in the eastern *Notitia* order of battle. *Lanciararii* legions are listed on the *Notitia* and most of the unit names were derived from names of border provinces. Historian Nicasie theorizes that they were originally formed by withdrawing *lanciararii* from border legions.¹⁶¹

Auxilia regiments, not to be confused with the older auxiliary cohorts, were first raised in 306 from Germanic war bands.¹⁶² By 337, *auxilia* regiments were not merely supporting the legions but were fighting in the main battle line. Armed similar to the legionaries, with the possible exception of armor, these versatile but often undisciplined regiments from the Rhineland, were capable of skillfully swimming major rivers using their shields as paddle boards, surprising Persian soldiers or Germanic warriors alike.¹⁶³

In place of *auxilia* units, the eastern army contained lightly armed legions. At the siege of Amida in 359, the Count Aelianus force-marched a brigade of six legions including the light legions *Superventores* (Skirmishers) and *Praeventores* (Scouts) to the city.¹⁶⁴ Fifteen hundred *lanciararii* and *Mattiararii* (Club Welders) are mentioned as the forward security screen of Julian's army.¹⁶⁵

Despite the increased number of cavalry units, the Roman legionary and *auxilia* remained swordsmen. The spear, whether *pila* or *lanceara*, was only a primary weapon when fighting cavalry or elephants, otherwise it was thrown, with darts and javelins before entering into hand-to-hand combat. Both Vegetius in *Epitoma Rei Militaris* (395-

¹⁶¹ M.J. Nicasie, *Twilight of Empire, The Roman Army From The Reign of Diocletian Until The Battle of Andrianople* (Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben, 1998), 190-191, fn23.

¹⁶² Michael P. Speidel, "Rising New Units for the Late Roman Army: "Auxilia Palatine," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 50 (1996), 163-170, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1291742>. Accessed December 11, 2011, 23:33.

¹⁶³ AM XVI 11.9, 261 and XXIV, 6.4-7, 459-461, and XXV, 6.10-15, 527-529.1-7.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., XVIII., 9.1-4, 463-467. Translators disagree whether these legions were cavalry or infantry.

¹⁶⁵ John Malalas, as quoted in Dodgeon and Lieu, 262. As used in the passage it is not clear whether the *lanciararii* is a unit name or a term for light infantry.

410) and the Emperor Maurice's Field Manuel *Strategikon* (582-602) agree that training with sword and shield was critical for the infantry.¹⁶⁶ Until the end of the fourth century infantry was the 'queen of battle' for the Roman army and it dominated the battlefield due to its discipline and training.

The expanded fourth century Roman cavalry retained the three basic types of cavalry of its third century predecessor: horse archers, various types of general cavalry and heavily-armored *cataphracti/clibanarii*. Up to the fourth century the various types of general cavalry, whether armed with bows, shields, spears and javelins, or two-handed pikes (*kontus*) wore some form of body armor.¹⁶⁷ There was a significant difference between the versatility of the lighter armored Roman cavalry and the heavily armored *cataphracti/clibanarii*. Constantius improved the Roman cavalry by expanding the *cataphracti/clibanarii* arm as noted by Julian in *Oration I* as a response to the superiority of Persian and Gothic cavalry.¹⁶⁸ These heavily armored men on armored horses, supported by horse archers were key to Constantius' victory against the usurper Magnentius at the Battle of Mursa in 351. The exact number of these regiments is unknown. The *Notitia* lists sixteen *cataphracti* and *clibanarii* regiments, of which seven were stationed in the east.

During the fourth century Roman cavalry provided key support functions to the infantry. Due to its relative speed and maneuverability over marching infantry columns, cavalry provided reconnaissance during the advance, screened the army from enemy reconnaissance and ambushes, covered foraging parties and provided dispatch riders.¹⁶⁹ Roman cavalry's primary task in battle was to protect the infantry's flanks and if possible drive off opposing cavalry. If successful in defeating enemy cavalry, Roman cavalry

¹⁶⁶ *Vegetius' Epitoma Rei Militaris*, 24-25; and *Strategikon*, 138.

¹⁶⁷ Dixon and Southern (1992), 34-53, 142-147.

¹⁶⁸ Julian, *Oration I*, 37C-38A (30.15-28, pp. 54-5, Bidez) as quoted in Dodgeon and Lieu, 173-174; A.D.H. Bivar, "Cavalry Equipment and Tactics on the Euphrates Frontier," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 26 (1972), 271-291, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1291323>. Accessed August 8, 2011, 11:36.

¹⁶⁹ Karen R. Dixon and Pat Southern (1992), 137-147.

attacked the flanks and rear of the enemy infantry. A potential problem for all types of cavalry was loss of cohesion, resulting in uncontrolled charges or disorderly withdrawals. In the fourth century Roman cavalry played a secondary role in battle, but were soldiers of choice in their constabulary roles in the Roman East.

Historian Hugh Elton asserts that the *limitanei* provided three functions on the border: policing, intelligence gathering, and deterring raids.¹⁷⁰ Due to the open terrain in the east the policing function fell to the *limitanei* cavalry. Surviving military records indicate the *limitanei* were also assigned responsibilities for recruitment, tax collection, and administration of justice in the communities around the forts.¹⁷¹ The police function included preventing deserters from leaving and spies from entering the empire. *Limitanei* interaction with the tribes along the border provided intelligence on Persian military matters.¹⁷²

Roman literary sources of the time did not record minor events.¹⁷³ Ammianus admits that he failed to record battles that were indecisive or insignificant.¹⁷⁴ In the east, Saracen raids targeted isolated travelers and small groups but left cities unmolested. The main roads and pilgrimage routes in Palestine were patrolled and protected by small forts. Important pilgrims were provided military escorts.¹⁷⁵ Bloody skirmishes were never recorded since they were unimportant by the standards of contemporary historians. Church historians had different criterion and as an example they recorded an event in 276 where a large Roman combat patrol returning from Persian territory mistook a local

¹⁷⁰ Hugh Elton (1997), 207-208; and Isaac, 147-148.

¹⁷¹ H.I. Bell, V. Martin, E.G. Turner, D. van Berchem. ed and trans. *The Abinnaeus Archive: The Papers of A Roman Officer in the Reign of Constantius II* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1962), 13-15.

¹⁷² AM, XVIII, 6.8, 439; and Elton (1997), 207-208.

¹⁷³ Elton (1997), 200-201.

¹⁷⁴ AM, XXVII,2.11, 13.

¹⁷⁵ Benjamin Isaac. "Bandits in Judaea and Arabia." *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, Vol. 88 (1984), 171-203, 200. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/311452>. Accessed August 8, 2011, 11:50.

regional agricultural ceremony as a Persian encampment.¹⁷⁶ This patrol was recorded due to its tragic results i.e. 1,800 civilian casualties.

The impetus for the improvement of fortifications during the fourth century was their failure to prevent Persian incursions into Roman Syria during the third century.¹⁷⁷ Emperors Diocletian and Constantine turned the province of Mesopotamia into a defensive zone of fortified cities to protect the rich province of Syria and city of Antioch.¹⁷⁸ During the first-third centuries the Roman military constructed towers flush with their fort's wall. Fighting was expected to take place outside the walls not upon them. In the middle of the third century forts were built with towers projecting out from the fort wall. This change in military construction signified a change in tactics and forts were now intended as fighting platforms.¹⁷⁹ These towers allowed defenders to protect vulnerable walls and gates from assaulting troops with enfilading fire from siege engines, archers and slingers.¹⁸⁰ When not stationed in cities *limitanei* units were stationed in forts ranging in size from garrison forts (accommodating a legion of 1,000 to 2,000 men) to small watchtower and blockhouses occupied by a rotating eight-man garrison.¹⁸¹

Roman armies of the East, fighting mostly from fortified positions relied upon torsion artillery: *ballistae* and scorpions, also known as the *onagri* (onager).¹⁸² The *ballistae* functioned like a huge cross bow firing a bolt or stone and were produced in various sizes, some small enough to be transported on a small cart or prolonged by its crew. The *onager* ('wild ass') was just beginning to be deployed in the fourth century. It

¹⁷⁶ O'Reilly, 34-39.

¹⁷⁷ Dodgeon and Lieu, 9-139.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid., 136-154.

¹⁷⁹ Jerome H. Farnum. *The Positioning of the Roman Legions* (Oxford, UK: BAR International Series 1458, 2005) 9; Southern and Dixon (1996), 127-147;

¹⁸⁰ Elton (1997), 163.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., 157-160.

¹⁸² AM, XXIII, 4.1-14, 325-333; and Southern and Dixon (1996), 153-160.

was simpler in design but ‘kicked like a wild ass’. The larger versions were mounted on fortresses and required reinforced walls and towers due to the stresses produced by their operation. Regardless of the size of the weapon, both types were primarily anti-personnel weapons.¹⁸³ These machines were very dangerous for the crews to operate. Ammianus delights in describing the gruesome death of a crewman of an onager when the weapon malfunctioned, tearing itself and the soldier to pieces.¹⁸⁴ With that appalling picture in mind it is understandable why the Gallic legions at Amida were not helpful in defending the walls of the city and preferred sallies outside the walls to engage the Persians with swords.¹⁸⁵

Logistics are the key to military victory. Vegetius observed that time and opportunity may help retrieve misfortune, but “where forage and provisions have not been carefully provided, the evil is without remedy. An exact calculation must therefore be made before the commencement of war of the number of troops” and the provisions needed to support all aspects of the operations.¹⁸⁶ Food, wood, fodder, and water were the four key requirements of an ancient campaign. Availability of these commodities dictated the time of year campaigns commenced and concluded as well as dictated the routes. The basic requirements for man and beast would have been similar for both the Roman and Persian armies.

Donald W. Engels study of the logistics of the Macedonian Army provides a baseline of an ancient army’s support requirements. A soldier required three pounds of grain and two quarts of water per day. Based upon weather and activity the water requirement could increase to two gallons per day. Horses and mules needed 10 pounds of fodder and 10 pounds of grain per day, plus eight gallons of water. Along with the combatants and their warhorses, noncombatants and supply animals needed the same

¹⁸³ AM, XIX, 2.7; Adrian Goldsworthy, *The Complete Roman Army*, (London: Thames & Hudson, 2003), 188-192.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 188-192.

¹⁸⁵ AM, XIX, 6.3-13, 497-503.

¹⁸⁶ Vegetius, 36.

rations. Pack and draught animals were required to carry an army's non-consumable supplies (tents, siege machinery, cooking equipment , extra weapons etc.). A force of 5,000 infantry required 1200 pack animals (mules can carry 200 pounds and camels 300 pounds for extended periods).¹⁸⁷ It was theoretically possible for an army to carry grain for about 20 days supply for the men on the soldier's backs. When the 60 pounds of food (20 days rations) was added to the weight of a soldier's weapons and equipment, the load could exceed 100 pounds. In addition the army supply train could only carry about ten days supply of grain for man and beast.¹⁸⁸ Alexander's Macedonians did not use wagons because they reduced an armies march rate and maneuverability. Romans used wagons drawn by oxen, which increased their carrying capacity but reduced the army's rate of march.

Rome relied heavily on wagons. Fourteen hundred mules were required to carry the equivalent of 350 wagons. Oxen can only maintain a rate of march of 15 miles per day at a speed of march between 2.5 and 3 miles per hour over an extended period of time. Horse and mule teams could maintain over a 15 miles per day rate of march.¹⁸⁹ To move large armies like Julian's *praesental* army of 65,000 with a minimum daily consumption of 251 tons of grain and 65 tons of fodder for the soldiers and cavalry horses alone, all manner of draft animals were required, plus 1100 riverboats. These figures do not take into account the grain to feed the thousands of pack and draft animals and their handlers.¹⁹⁰ The forage requirement for the thousands of pack animals and cavalry mounts for preindustrial armies was difficult to procure, which was why they normally waited until late spring or early summer to begin a campaign, when foraging parties could gather the fodder from the seasonal grass.

¹⁸⁷ Roth, 83.

¹⁸⁸ Engels, 18-21.

¹⁸⁹ Engels, 14-16; and Roth, 14-58

¹⁹⁰ John Peddie. *The Roman War Machine* (Gloucestershire: Sutton Publishing Ltd., 1997), 40-58; and Adrian Goldsworthy (2003), 170.

In 507 Joshua the Stylite chronicler recorded the events of the Roman-Persian War of 502-507. During the 501-502 campaign two Roman armies, totaling 52,000 men, were operating in the vicinity of Edessa. The army bakers were unable to make sufficient biscuits for the combined force so the commissary-general Appion ordered the people of Edessa to make the biscuits (*bucellatum*) for the army at their own cost with 630,000 *modii* of grain.¹⁹¹ One *modii*, was approximately eight dry quarts, fed a *contubernium* (tent group or squad) of eight soldiers for one day.¹⁹² The grain recorded could feed 52,000 men for approximately 90 days and weighed 10,080,000 pounds or 5,040 tons. Joshua only takes note of the grain made into biscuits. A document from 360 lists individual daily rations in a garrison at the equivalent of three pounds of bread, two pounds of meat, two pints of wine and 1/8 pint of oil.¹⁹³

If one adds the grain and fodder for the cavalry horses and fodder for the draft animals to the tonnage required to feed the army for 90 days totals are doubled to a minimum of 10,080 tons. When these logistical planning factors are applied it becomes apparent that a besieging army of 50,000 men must either capture a fortified city within 90 days or pack up and march home. If the army's operation exceeded the 90-day limit, it starved. During the 359 Campaign, Ammianus claims the Persians left 30,000 dead in the Roman province.¹⁹⁴ The siege lasted 73 days and the maneuvers before the siege were between 15-30 days. Shapur's total operation lasted between 90-100 days. Most of the deaths would have been caused by starvation and related diseases.

Expendable weapons required for a campaign, such as javelins and arrows were included in an army baggage train. In the tenth century, a Byzantine army of 34,000 requisitioned 800,000 arrows and 10,000 javelins. A Byzantine or Late Roman archer carried 30-40 arrows. If this army only contained 9,000 archers the requisition would

¹⁹¹ *The Chronicle of Joshua The Stylite* Translated and edited by Wright, William (Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1968), 44; and Greatrex (1988), 96.

¹⁹² Roth, 22; A *modii* equates to approximately between 9-10 quarts or 8.7 liters with a weight 16-20 pounds depending on the grain.

¹⁹³ Jones, 629, 1261 fn 44.

¹⁹⁴ AM, XIX., 9.9-, 519-521.

have provided 88 arrows per man.¹⁹⁵ The weight of the weapons in the baggage train would have been insignificant compared to the weight of the food and fodder required for the campaign.

The Roman government established arsenals (*fabricae*) for the manufacture of weapons and armor. According to the *Notitia* there were arsenals for weapons, armor and shields at Damascus, Antioch, Nicomedia, Sardis, Adrianople, Mricianopolis, Horreum Margi, Ratiaria, Thessalonica and Naissus. Cavalry armor was produced at Antioch, Caesarea in Cappadocia and Nicomedia.¹⁹⁶ A.D. Lee points out that the arsenals in the east were located a significant distance behind the *limes* to guard against capture, but were also located in the vicinity of the greatest threat to the security of the empire.¹⁹⁷

The difficulty of supplying an army limited its size. Despite the Roman Army's size during the fourth century (varying between 345-600,000 depending on the historian) armies in the field rarely exceeded 40,000 men and the majority of armies in the Late Roman period never exceeded 25,000.¹⁹⁸ Vegetius recommends the optimal size of an army at 20,000 infantry and 4,000 cavalry for a *magister militum*; a ratio of four infantry to one cavalryman.¹⁹⁹ Based upon this ratio Julian's *praesental* army of 65,000 would have contained 52,000 infantry and 13,000 cavalry. Larger armies, like Julian's 85-95,000 man invasion force in 363, were divided into two or more operating armies that

¹⁹⁵ Hugh Elton, "Cavalry in Late Roman Warfare," 377-381. Ariel S. Lewin and Pietrina Pellegrini. Ed., *The Late Roman Army in the Near East from Diocletian to the Arab Conquest: Proceedings of a colloquium held at Potenza Acerenza and Matera, Italy (May 2005)* (Oxford: British Archaeological Reports International Series 1717, 2007).

¹⁹⁶ A.D. Lee, *War in Late Antiquity, A Social History* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 91-93.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 89-94.

¹⁹⁸ Nicasie, 203-207.

¹⁹⁹ Vegetius 35; and Nicasie, 207.

coordinated maneuvers, but operated in different regions.²⁰⁰ Any other approach would have over-taxed the land and the army would starve.

Ammianus and other historians, including Julius Caesar, fail to record time - distance factors of marching armies, which have a bearing on their narratives. Understanding these factors often clarifies passages made cloudy over time. Marching in a close column (six soldier wide) of 5,000 men occupied 1,334 yards of road space. Fifty-two thousand infantry in close march column occupied at least 13,340 yards of road space or between six-seven miles. Adding the baggage train extended the column to over twelve miles.²⁰¹ When the advance guard reached the site of a new camp, at three miles per hour, it would have taken over four hours for the rear guard to reach the camp. Julian solved this problem by marching his army in parallel columns, but wanting to appear stronger than he was, he had the column extended to ten miles by having greater intervals between units.²⁰²

²⁰⁰ During the 502-506 war two armies with a combined strength of 52,000 operated in the same region as one army of 40,000 and a second army of 12,000. Greatrex (1988), 96.

²⁰¹ John Peddie, *The Roman War Machine*, (Gloucestershire: Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd., 1997), 72-76; and Goldsworthy (2003), 174.

²⁰² AM, XXIV, 1.2, 401.

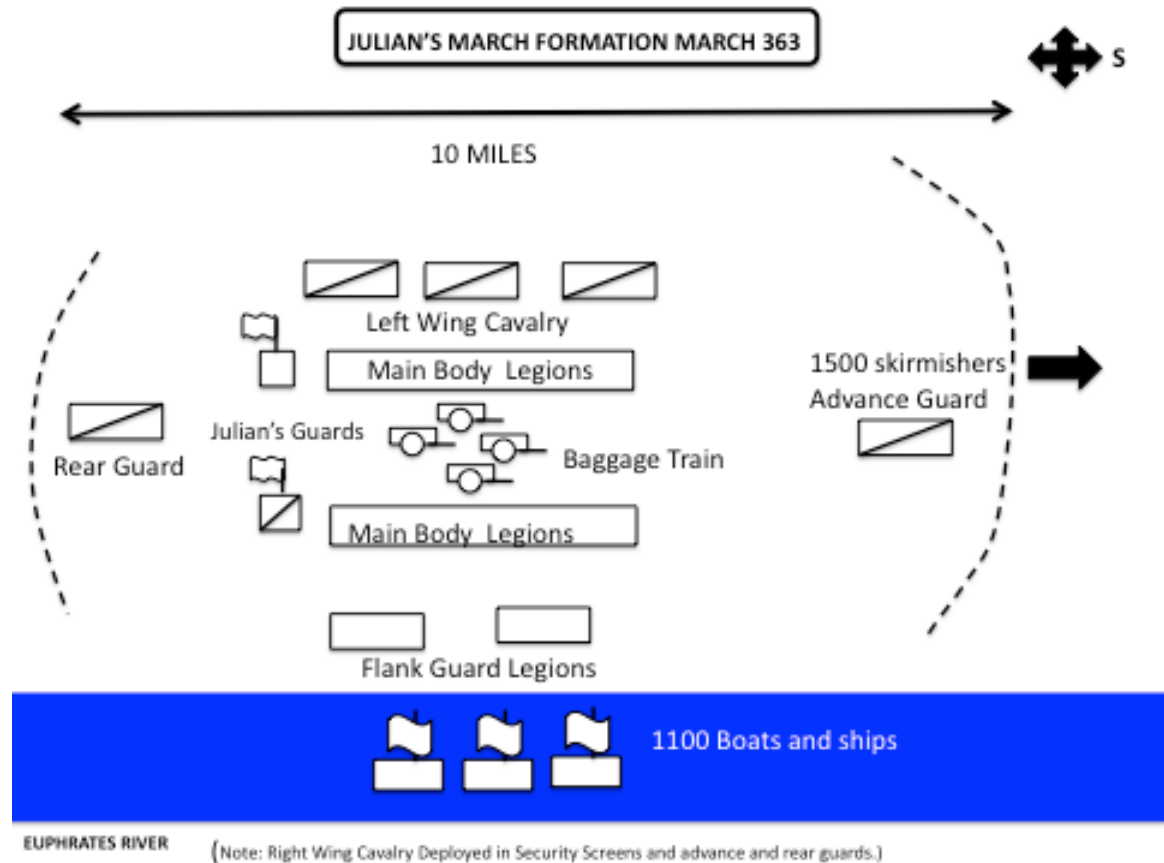


Illustration 1²⁰³

Defense Of The Roman East

Scholars debate whether the Late Roman emperors, and specially Emperors Diocletian and Constantine, had a grand strategy for the defense of the Roman Empire.²⁰⁴

²⁰³ Ibid., XXIV, 1.1-4, 401-403; and Nicasie, 201.

²⁰⁴ Edward N. Luttwak, (1979); Everett L. Wheeler, "Methodological Limits and the Mirage of Roman Strategy: Part I." *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 57, No. 1 (Jan., 1993), 7-41. <http://www.jstor.org/stable2944221>. Accessed August 9, 2011, 11:36; Evertt L. Wheeler, "Methodological Limtis and the Mirage of Roman Strategy: Part II." *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 57, No. 2 (Apr., 1993), 215-240. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2944057>. Accessed: August 9, 2011, 12:00; Kimberly Kagan, "Redefining Roman Grand Strategy." *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 70, No. 2 (Apr., 2006), 333-362. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4137956>. Accessed: August 8,

The Roman *Limes* stretched over six thousand kilometers from the North Sea along the Rhine and Danube Rivers to the Black Sea; along the Tigris River, along the edge of the Arabian Desert to the Red Sea and then along the edge of the Sahara Desert to the Atlantic Ocean. The historian Whittaker is of the opinion that there could not have been a grand strategy due to the length of the *limes* and the diverse threats along its length.²⁰⁵ Isaac bases his opposition to the probable existence of a grand strategy on his conviction that Roman emperors' policy considerations were primarily focused on maintaining political power rather than establishing a systematic defense of the empire.²⁰⁶

There are no documents proving Diocletian and Constantine formulated a grand strategy. Only criticism of their strategy by near contemporary historians like Zosimus provide testimony that it existed.²⁰⁷ There is circumstantial archaeological evidence however that indicates not only that there was a grand defensive strategy but that it was successful. Massive public and private resources were expended to develop fortified zones along the Eastern *limes* and the army was reorganized and expanded in order to defend the empire. This proves the Emperors' obvious defensive intent.²⁰⁸ The Treaty of 298 illustrated Diocletian's intent not to expand the empire into Persia proper. The fact that emperors, counts and dukes attacked across the *limes*, winning battles and burning barbarian villages or sacking Persian cities does not negate the fact that the empire was on the strategic defense and was not attempting to add new provinces.²⁰⁹

2011, 11:00; and Edward N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Byzantine Empire* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard University Press, 2009).

²⁰⁵ C.R. Whittaker, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire, A Social and Economic Study* (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1994), 132-133.

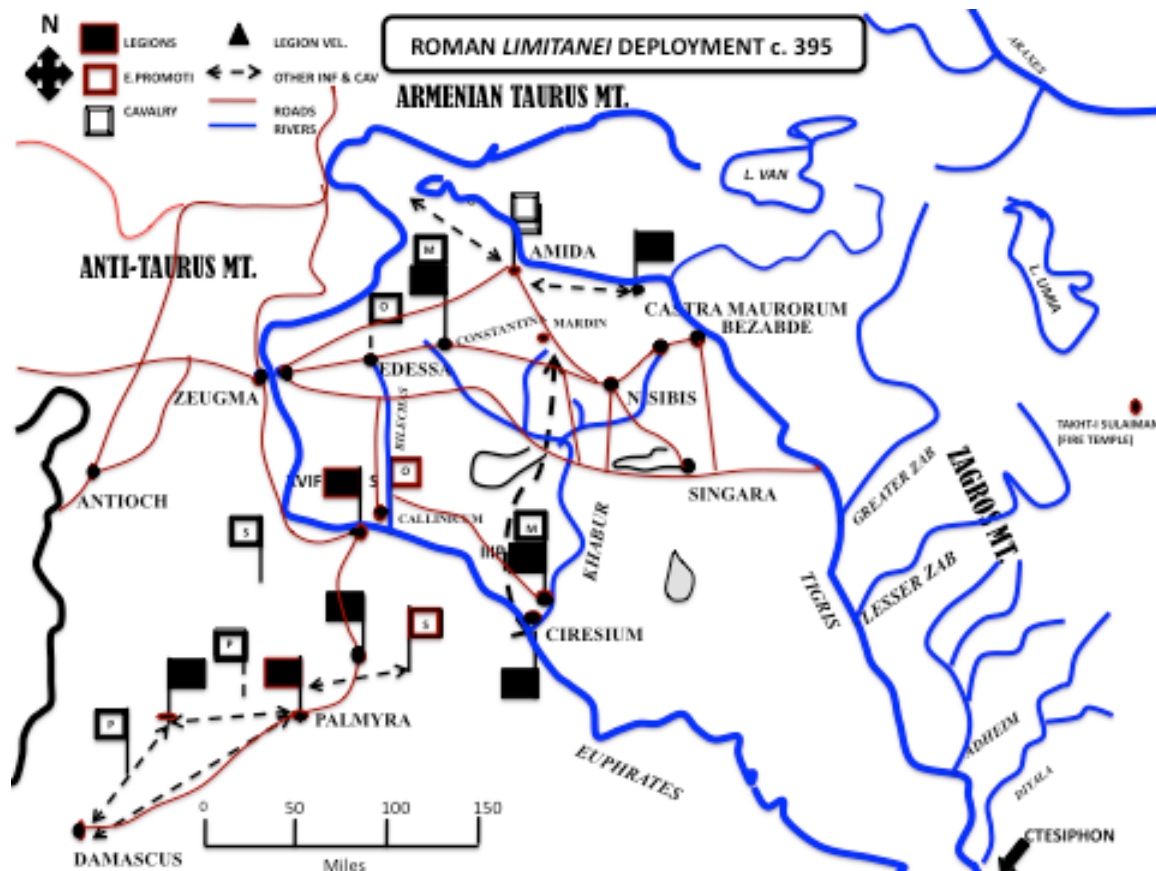
²⁰⁶ Isaac, 373-387, 416, 419-420, 424.

²⁰⁷ Zosimus, 51-55.

²⁰⁸ Stephen Johnson, *Late Roman Fortifications* (Towtowa, NJ: Barnes and Noble Books, 1983), 253.

²⁰⁹ Robin Seager, "Perceptions of Eastern Frontier Policy in Ammianus, Libanius, and Julian (337-363)." *The Classic Quarterly*, New Series, Vol. 47, No. 1 (1997), 253-268. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/639612>. Accessed September 5, 2012, 09:50; and see

Diocletian's organization of the defense of the East put Rome on the strategic defense against the Persians. No emperor who followed Diocletian, with the notable exception of Julian, made any serious attempt to expand the empire into Persia. Based on the *Notitia*, completed c. 395 Jones argues that the defensive system established by Diocletian survived almost intact in the eastern portion of the empire, having been relocated only due to the Roman defeat and the resulting Treaty of 363.²¹⁰



Map 4²¹¹

By studying the deployment of the *limitanei* armies of the provinces of Phoenice, Syria, Euphratensis, Osrhoene, and Mesopotamia in 395, the Roman defensive strategy for 337-

generally Harry G. Summers, Jr. *On Strategy: The Vietnam War in Context*. Carlisle Penn: Strategic Institute Studies, 1982.

²¹⁰ Jones (1964), 610.

²¹¹ Dodgeon and Lieu, 340-349 and 397-400; Talbert, 67, 69, 68, 71 and 86-99.

363 can be templated. The provinces of Phoenicia, Mesopotamia, Syria and Osrhoene contain a higher proportion of cavalry regiments than other regions.²¹² The legions were stationed in fortress cities on possible Persian avenues of approach, and guarded the main caravan routes and major road junctions. With the exception of Phoenicia, the cavalry was stationed along river lines forming a defensive screen connecting the legionary fortress cities. In close support of each legion (either stationed with the legion or in a nearby fortified town) was an *equites promoti* cavalry regiment. Former antique legion cavalry contingents, these regiments were promoted into independent cavalry units prior to the commencement of the Nisibis War.²¹³ The legions and *equites promoti* were deployed in such away as to give each duke a provincial rapid reaction or strike force.

The cavalry was also stationed in depth along the Belikh River and the crossing point at Zeugma on the Euphrates River. Most of the cavalry was stationed in the Mesopotamian steppes or Tigris-Euphrates River valleys. The limited infantry cohorts were stationed to patrol rough ground and mountainous passes. This deployment allowed these armies to scout the *limes* for raiders, protect caravans, enforce trade regulations, and provide early warning of a Persian invasion. Legionary detachments, supported by *equites promoti*, could have been dispatched in response to intermediate threats and in the case of serious assault by the Persians they could have defended their fortresses until the Eastern Field Army deployed from Antioch. In 395 the Eastern Field Army contained nineteen legions, two *auxilia* regiments and eleven cavalry regiments. Assuming Jones' regimental totals are correct and that the regiments were at full strength, the Eastern Field Army was comprised of approximately 21,000 infantry and 5,500 cavalry.²¹⁴

Phoenicia had no river line for its *limes*. The *Strata Diocletian* which connected Damascus to the legionary fortress of Palmyra and the legionary fortress of Syria at Oresa

²¹² Excluding the legions, Phoenice was garrisoned with 19 cavalry and 5 infantry regiments; Syria and Euphratensis, 11 cavalry and 4 infantry regiments; Osrhoene, 15 cavalry and 2 infantry regiments; and Mesopotamia, 13 cavalry and 2 infantry regiments. See Dodgeon and Lieu, Appendix 5, 340-348.

²¹³ Michael Pavkovic, *The legionary horsemen: An essay on equites legionis and equites promoti* (Ph.D. Dissertation: University of Hawaii, 1991).

²¹⁴ Close to Vegetius' 4 infantry to 1 cavalry ratio.

and Sura became the border. Phoenicia's problem, not being on the Euphrates' avenues of approach, was Saracen raiders rather than Persian invaders. Its *limitanei* army was deployed in two echelons. The first echelon of tightly grouped regiments stretched along the *Strata* Diocletian from Damascus to Palmyra along the edge of the desert. The second echelon was deployed on the hilly terrain along the road network north of the *via* Diocletian centered on Danaba, headquarters of the legion III *Gallica*.²¹⁵ A few cavalry regiments were deployed in the Syrian Desert southeast of the *Strata* Diocletian at oases to deny Saracen raider key watering points. This deployment was not surprising considering the Saracen warrior Queen Mavia's revolt in 370s over a Christian theological issue.²¹⁶

As a final note on the c. 395 deployment, Dodgeon and Lieu argue that the cavalry regiment *Ala quintadecima Flavia Carduenorum* (Corduene) and infantry regiment *Cohors quqrtadecima Valeria Zabenorum* (Zabdicene) were raised in the five Trans-Tigris regions. If they are correct there would have been at least three other Trans-Tigris regiments that did not survive the Nisibis War. These regiments would have been raised to police and patrol their home regions. Empires often recruit local soldiers from tribal regions to help police tribal lands. The British Khyber Rifles and the American Apache and Navaho Scouts are nineteenth century examples of this technique. The Persians treated such soldiers as traitors and after the fall of Amida in 359, captured survivors were executed.²¹⁷ Finally, Dodgeon and Lieu argue that legion I Parthia *Nisibena*, stationed at Constanina in 395 may have been stationed at Nisibis during the Nisibis War. Established by Septimius Severus, I Parthia was originally stationed at Singara. Shapur's three attacks on Nisibis and the legion's honorific '*Nisibena*' support

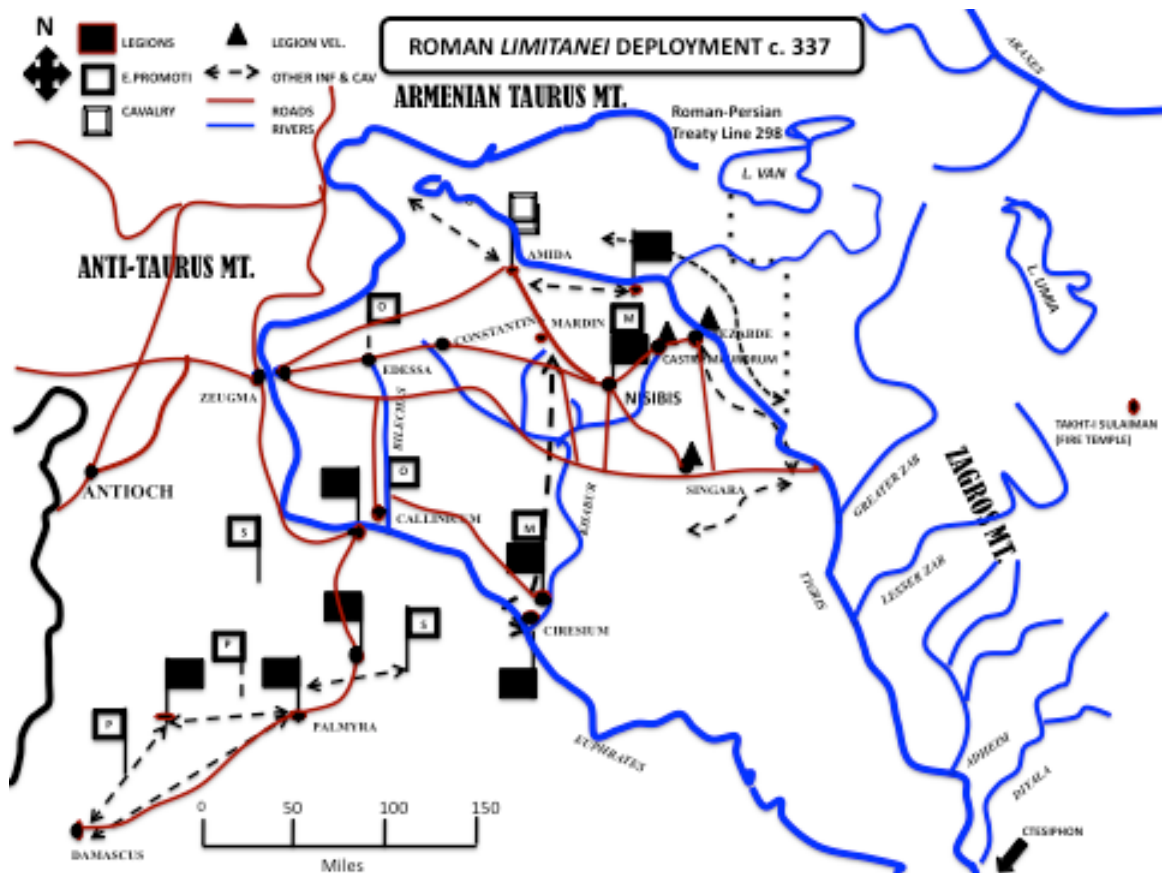
²¹⁵ Dodgeon and Lieu, Appendix 5, 340-348.

²¹⁶ Queen Mavia personally led her Saracen warriors in raids along the Roman *limes* from Phoenicia to Egypt and defeated the Roman Field Army in open battle then dictated the terms of the peace. *The Ecclesiastical History of Sozomen: Comprising A History Of The Church From A.D. 324-440*, trans., Edward Walford, (London: Henry G. Bohn, 1855) 307,308.

²¹⁷ AM, XIX, 9.2, 515.

the proposition that sometime before the war commenced the legion's headquarters was shifted and only a detachment deployed forward as part of the garrison at Singara.²¹⁸

In determining the Roman defensive strategy in 330s, sources provide a partial picture and archeology fills in the blanks. The only province that was greatly impacted by the peace treaty of 363 was Mesopotamia. During the period 298 to 363 the defensive foundation for the Province of Mesopotamia were the fortress cities of Amida in the north on the Tigris, Bezabde in the west on the Tigris, Singara on the southern slope of *Jebei Sinjar* Mountain, and Nisibis in the center of the Mesopotamian Steppes.



Map 5²¹⁹

Castra Maurorum in the *Tur Abin* Mountains reinforced Bezabde. Taking the example of the defensive pattern in the *Notita*, each city would have been supported by cavalry

²¹⁸ Dodgeon and Lieu, 399 fn 35, 38 and 41; See also C.S. Lightfoot, "The Third Siege of Nisibis (A.D. 350)," *Historia: Zeitschrift für alte Geschichte*, Bd. 37, H 1 (1st Qtr., 1988), 105-125, 108; <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4436041>. Accessed September 20, 2010, 21:30.

²¹⁹ Dodgeon and Lieu, 340-349 and 397-400; and Talbert, 67, 69, 68, 71 and 86-99.

forts in open terrain and infantry forts in rough terrain. In the Singara *limes* surveys in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and the use of the *Peutinger Itinerary* have located structures that may have controlled routes from the desert into the Singara *limes* as well as possible crossing points of the Tigris River near Nimrud and Nineveh.²²⁰ The Amida *limes* were supported by forts along the Tigris River as depicted in the *Notitia* and described Ammianus in 359.²²¹ The Bezabde *limes* were supported by Castra Maurorum just east of Bezabde on the road to Nisibis and other forts such as Seh Gubba along the Tigris River.²²² In addition, the Bezabde *limes* could have projected a forward presence either as forts or routine patrols of Trans-Tigris region in the Roman sphere of influence east of the Tigris.

Based upon the information available, the situational template in 337 for the *Limitanei* Army of Mesopotamia has I Parthia *Nisbena* headquartered at Nisibis with a legionary detachment in Singara. II Parthia occupied Cefa, Bezadbe and Castra Maurorum. In 395 Amida did not rate a legionary garrison. This may have been the case at the beginning of the war in 337. The legion V Parthia was Amida's primary garrison in 359 and was probably created after Amida was sacked in 337 when the city was rebuilt and heavily fortified.

The actual manpower required to man the defense along the *limes* is still an open issue. The Arabian *Limes* provide a base line for the study of the practical not the theoretical manpower required for defending the Eastern Frontier. Unlike the Rhine-Danube *Limes*, the Arabian *Limes* never collapsed during the fourth and fifth centuries nor were they adjusted due to a defeat, as were the Mesopotamian *Limes*. Unlike the old re-built forts along the Rhine-Danube *limes*, Diocletian and Constantine established new forts east of the Jordan River and Dead Sea along the military road, *via Nova Traiana*. The *Limitanei* armies of Arabia and Palestine were organized much like the other ducates

²²⁰ Julian Reade, "An Eagle from the East," *Britannia*, Vol. 30 (1999), 286-288, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/526684>. Accessed August 9, 2011, 09:00.

²²¹ AM XVIII, 10.1-4, 467-469.

²²² Read argues that Seh Gubba is location of Castra Maurorum. See Read, 286-288.

of the Middle East.²²³ The official strength of the armies varied depending upon which theory of Late Roman regiments strength is accepted. Using the *Notitia*, Jones (writing in 1964) estimated that the Ducate of Arabia was garrisoned by a *limitanei* army of between 13,500 to 19,500, (consisting of two legions, twelve cavalry *equites* and *alas* regiments, and five infantry *cohort* regiments).²²⁴ Parker (writing in 2006), and his team that excavated the Arabic *Limes*, place the effective strength of the Arabian *Limitanei* Army at between 6,050 and 8,050.²²⁵ While Jones and Parker agree on the number of regiments, Parker bases his reduced regiment size upon the small size of the fortresses and Roman military records found in Egypt. These records and excavated barracks suggest that *limitanei* cavalry regiments were comprised of 120 horsemen and 160 footmen in the cohorts rather than Jones' theorized strength of 500.²²⁶

Applying these facts to troop deployment in the Province of Mesopotamia in 337 I and II Parthia appear to start the war with their full antique complement of ten cohorts with a combined strength of between 8-10,000 men. During the war, with the need to garrison Amida, V Parthia was created from a detachment from I and/or II Parthia. In the *Notitia* the Province of Mesopotamia contained thirteen cavalry and two infantry auxiliary regiments. In 337 at least three auxiliary regiments should have been added for the three Trans-Tigris regions not represented in the *Notitia*. Assuming Jones' figures of 500 per regiment the auxiliary strength would have been 9,000 men (8,000 cavalry and 1,000 infantry). Applying Parker's figures of approximately 200 men per regiment the

²²³ S. Thomas Parker, *The Frontier in Central Jordan, Final Report on the Limes Arabicus Project*, Volume I (Washington D.C.: Dumbarton Oaks, 2006), 544-545; Luke Ueda-Sarson. "Late Roman Shield Designs Taken from the *Notitia Dignitatum*." *Luke Ueda-Sarson's Wargame Pages*, 2006. <http://www.ne.jp/asahi/luke/ueda-sarson/NotitiaPatterns.html>. Accessed November 20, 2012 09:45.

²²⁴ Jones, 679-686. Jones estimates that *Comitatenses* legions had an authorized strength of 1,000 and *Limitanei* legions at between 1,000 to 3,000. *Auxilia Palatine* infantry regiments were authorized 600 to 700 and most other cavalry and infantry units at about 500.

²²⁵ The variance is dependant whether the two *Limitanei legions tertiae Cyrenaicae* and *quartae Martiae* had 1,000 or 2000 men. Parker, 544-545.

²²⁶ Jones, 52-59, 96-100, 1257, fn 31 and 1280 fn. 170-173.

total would be 3,600 (3,200 cavalry and 400 infantry). Pre-20th century armies commonly allowed regimental strength to drop below 50% when engaged in constabulary operations, which could explain the discrepancy between the two figures.²²⁷ This defensive scheme employed between 12,000-19,000 men in fortified positions across the Province of Mesopotamia with at least 3,600 cavalry patrolling the border. For the defense strategy to work, the field army had to advance into the defensive zone and counter any large Persian invasion. As the Nisibis War unfolded considerations in other regions of the empire dictated where the Eastern Field Army was committed. As a result, the *Limitanei* Army of Mesopotamia successfully fought, often alone, unsupported by the emperor for most of the twenty-five year war.

This historical data supports the conclusion that the emperors of the fourth century expended the empire's wealth by creating a defensive system of improved border forts and city fortifications. They pinched pennies by subdividing the army and creating a border army, the *limitanei*, that had lower status, lower pay and fewer benefits than the more prestigious *comitatenses* regiments. All regiments were provided cheaper equipment than their first and second century predecessors. The emperors compensated for their tightfistedness by providing regiments with experienced commanders and dukes, many being long service professionals, instead of court appointed favorites. Battlefield performance often had more to do with training and leadership than regimental status. The new defense system was tested in 337, while the Emperor Constantine laid dying on his deathbed.

²²⁷ Kendall D. Gott, *In Search of an Elusive Enemy: The Victorio Campaign* (Fort Leavenworth, Kansas: Combat Institute Press, 2004), 12-15.

Chapter 5

The Persian Army and the Strategic Offense

The most striking difference between the Parthian and Sasanian Empires was the latter's emphasis on charismatic leadership by the king, a centralized government, and a link between the king and Zoroastrianism, which became the state religion in the third century. During the rise of Persia in the third century under Ardashir I and Shapur I, Persia was a warrior-kingdom built on the desire for glory, booty and expansion. The Sasanian Empire was based upon the union of the seven great Parthian families, lead by the Sasan family, which held the kingship. Unlike the Parthians, the Sasanians created a centralized feudal state, which eventually developed a central administration that to an extent eliminated the semi-independence of the hereditary kingdoms.²²⁸

Persian society was divided into four classes: clergy, warriors, bureaucrats, and commoners. The three upper classes overlapped and were often drawn from the same families. These classes formed the Persian nobility. Within the nobility there were four grades. The highest class was the *Shahrdars* comprised of the provincial governors belonging to the Sasanid family. The nobility proper was lead by six principal families dating back to the Parthian period. The most important were the Surens and Karans who owned vast estates throughout the empire and occupied hereditary posts in the government. Heads of families were the *Vaspuhr*. The principle ministers formed the third grade as *Vuzurgan* or Great Ones. The fourth grade consisted of a great number of lesser nobility, the *Azadhan*, 'Free Men or Barons.' Below them were the *Dehqans*, 'village squires' who ruled their village and functioned as the local tax collector. It was from the nobility that the *Savaran* (knightly cavalry) were drawn.²²⁹ The commoners consisted of the farmers, town artisans, and country peasantry. The peasantry was tied to the land similar to serfs and performed statutory labor for the kingdom and their

²²⁸ Blockley (1992), 101,102.

²²⁹ British Naval Intelligence Division, *Persia* (Geographic Handbook Series, September 1945. Declassified), 245.

landlords. They paid land and personal capitalization taxes to the Royal Treasury. In time of war they were drafted as an infantry levy.²³⁰

It has been commonly assumed that the Persian Army mustered by Shapur was a feudal host consisting of landed elites and their retainers, supported by a simple logistics system limited to good roads, supply dumps, and defended forward positions. Howard-Johnson argues that by the mid-fourth century the Persian Army was a sophisticated semi-professional army, and the defense of Persian Mesopotamia resembled the fortified zone of Roman Mesopotamia.²³¹ The evidence indicates the kingdom had regional armies guarding its borders, garrisons in its cities and a field army led by the king.

The kings of Persia faced a strategic dilemma similar to that of the Romans.²³² They faced the Romans and Saracens on their western border and they had to contend with nomadic tribal confederations on their northern border. After Rome became Christian in 325, they had an additional, perceived internal threat from their Christian population. Like Rome, Persia had developed Mesopotamia into a fortified zone. Persian Mesopotamia had developed fortified cities along the Euphrates similar to the Romans. The cities of Anatha, Thilutha, Achaiachaia, Baraxmialcha, and Pirisabora on the Euphrates River and Maozamalcha on the canal between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers were significant fortifications.²³³ In addition to the fortified Euphrates cities there was a system of moats and earth walls west of the Euphrates to hinder raiding Saracens and defend Shapur's loyal Arab settlements. A moat and fortification system was constructed from Hat to Basra and settled Arab militia garrisoned the villages. It is

²³⁰ *Persia*, 245.

²³¹ James Howard-Johnson, *East Rome, Sasanian Persia and the End of Antiquity* (Cornwall: Ashgate Publishing Ltd., 2006), 188-189.

²³² James Howard-Johnson, "The Sasanians' Strategic Dilemma," *Commutatio et Contentio; Studies in the Late Roman, Sasanian, and Early Islamic Near East; in memory of Zeev Rubin*, (Dusseldorf: Wellem, 2010), 37-70.

²³³ Howard-Johnson (2006), 188-189; AM, XXIV 2.1-.3, 409-411.

reported to have been a continuous fortification.²³⁴ Ammianus verified the existence of this defensive system but described it “as mounds along the banks [of the river] to prevent Saracens from raiding Assyria.”²³⁵

The Tigris River lacked the level of man made fortification found on the Euphrates. However, four rivers (Great Zab, Lesser Zab, Adheim, and Diyala) intersected the Tigris from the Zagros Mountains and formed natural defensive barriers. The west bank was primarily desert. During the Roman Emperor Heraclius’ 627 Campaign, the Lesser Zab had some fortifications defending its four bridges and these minor fortifications probably existed in the fourth century.²³⁶

The region east of the Caspian Sea and north of the main Persian lines of communication and trade between Damaghan and Merv (a.k.a. Marv and Mu-lu) was where the Eurasian steppes met the Iranian plateau. After 350 this section of the Persian *limes* would be under constant pressure from tribal confederations. The situation became so troublesome that in the late fifth or early sixth century (scholars disagree as to the date) the Persians built a 120 mile wall between the Caspian Seas and the Elburz Mountains just north of and parallel to the Gorgan River. The wall had fortresses along its length with a barracks capacity of up to 30,000 men.²³⁷ The fortified oasis city of Merv anchored the Persian *limes* in the east. In addition to the city walls there was a wall around the oasis that was almost 150 miles long.

While the details of the Persian command, structure are limited Roman accounts indicate they had a regional command structure in the mid-fourth century and that it was

²³⁴ Richard Nelson Frye, “The Sasanian System of Walls For Defense,” *Studies in Memory of Gaston Wiet*, 1977, 7-15, 10.

²³⁵ AM, XXV, 6.8, 523.

²³⁶ Howard-Johnson (2006), 190.

²³⁷ Fraye, 12-14; Jebrael Nokandeh, Eberhard W. Sauer et. al., “Linear Barriers of Northern Iran: The Great Wall of Gorgan and the Wall of Tammisher,” *Iran*, Vol. 44 (2006), 121-173. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4300707>. Accessed October 22, 2012, 09:15; and Hamid Omrani Rekavandi, Ederhard W. Sauer et. al., “An Imperial Frontier Of The Sasanian Empire: Further Fieldwork At The Great Wall of Gorgan,” *Iran*, Vol. 45 (2007), 95-136. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/25651414>. Accessed October 22, 2012, 09:45.

more sophisticated than a simple feudal host. The ultimate commander-in-chief was King of Kings Shapur. Shapur was a storybook king. Brave in battle, chivalrous to the weak, and at the beginning of his reign, wise beyond his years. In 325, at sixteen and without military experience, he allegedly masterminded a long complicated land and sea campaign to subdue the Arabian coast and pacify the Arab tribes along Persia's western border.²³⁸ Such exploits made good poetry for the bard; however it is known that he had capable advisors and generals from the beginning.²³⁹ It is clear that the Persians developed a sophisticated command structure based on both feudal and centralized elements.²⁴⁰ Shapur's command system produced competent field commanders who successfully operated independently of the king's army.²⁴¹

The Persian army that followed Shapur was significantly different from the Roman Army of the fourth century. Ammianus described the Persian army in battle array outside of Ctesiphon:

“... with squadrons of [*catafractarii/clibonarii*] drawn up in serried ranks that their movements in close-fitting coats of flexible mail dazzled our eyes, while all their horses were protected by housings of leather. They were supported by detachments of infantry...in compact formation... Behind them came elephants looking like moving hills.”²⁴²

²³⁸ Al-Tabari, 54-57.

²³⁹ Based upon the extensive records of Alexander the Great campaigns, we know he was assisted by experienced generals inherited from his father and his own companions. He could not have accomplished what he did alone. Neither could Shapur.

²⁴⁰ Farrokh (2005), 6-8.

²⁴¹ In 336 Narses, possibly the brother of Shapur, commanded an army that captured Amida and invaded Roman Mesopotamia. In 350 when Shapur moved east to face the Huns, Tamsapor, was left in charge of the Roman War. He also commanded a cavalry advance guard during Shapur's 359 invasion. In 363 Surena commanded the Persian delaying force opposing Julian's advance south along the Euphrates River. Also in 363 Generals Merena and Nohodares commanded the tactical battles against Julian's retreating army. These events are discussed in detail in following chapters.

²⁴² AM, XXIV 6.8, 468.

The Persian cavalry was the decisive arm of the Persian army from its foundation in the third century to its destruction in the seventh century. The army's dominant arm was the noble feudal armored knights known as *Savaran* but referred to by the Romans as *catafractarii* or *clibonarii*.²⁴³ The *Savaran* were divided between armored lancers and armored horse archers. Artifacts and rock reliefs of Persian kings, observations of Ammianus, and later Persian records provide a detailed description of *Savaran* arms, equipment, and tactics.²⁴⁴ In open battle the *Savaran* were heavily armored on armored horses armed with *kontos* (cavalry pikes not lances), swords, shield, and bows.²⁴⁵ In skirmishes they most likely wore less armor. Unlike European medieval knights the *Savaran* were more versatile. Fully armored in formal battle they were formidable opponents even for Roman infantry.

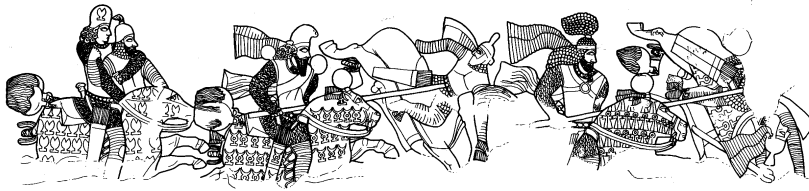


Illustration 2

Savaran Knights: 3rd Century Sketch of Relief at Firuzabad, Iran.²⁴⁶

²⁴³ Kaveh Farrokh, *Sassanian Elite Cavalry AD 224-642* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2005), 3-5; AM, XXIV 6.8, 461.

²⁴⁴ Farrokh (2005), 9-22; A.D.H. Bivar. "Cavalry Equipment and Tactics on the Euphrates Frontier," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 26 (1972), 271-291. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1291323>. Accessed September 23, 2010, 22:50.

²⁴⁵ Farrokh (2005), 27-28.

²⁴⁶ Crown Prince Shapur in battle against the Parthians. Note horse barding, segmental body armor, arrow quiver, and lance held across the horse's neck. Illustration included

In skirmishes with Roman cavalry they were a terror. Prior to the battle outside Ctesiphon, Julian was plagued by the operations of General Surena's Persian cavalry in league with Emir Podosaces' Assenite Saracens (Arabs). These nimble horsemen ambushed Julian's cavalry security screen, raided the Roman supply trains, disgraced four Roman cavalry regiments in combat, and shadowed the Roman advance.²⁴⁷ They became such a nuisance that when the Romans pitched camp to besiege *Maozamalcha* they had to take "precautions against any sudden attack by the Persian horse, whose daring in open country inspires unspeakable dread in all peoples."²⁴⁸

The Persian infantry, could comprise up to two thirds of a Sasanian army in the field.²⁴⁹ Ammianus described Sasanian infantry as armed with shields, spears, and bows. Being levies, they lacked the training and discipline of their Roman counterparts. Persian foot archers were highly regarded by the Romans. Their mission in open battle was to shower masses of arrows down upon the Romans in order to weaken their defense against the charge of the *savaran*. The mass archery was only effective for a maximum of 200 yards. In theory spearmen with large shields protected the archers from Roman infantry. Ammianus mentions Persian armored infantry capable of resisting Roman attacks. Farrokh theorizes that the Persians were developing a core of professional infantry from the early days of the kingdom.²⁵⁰ The centralization of the kingdom and the requirements

with the permission of Jona Lendering from www.livius.org; Farrok (2004), 179-182; J.C. Coulston. "Roman, Parthian and Sasanid Tactical Development." 59-75 in Philip Freeman and David Kennedy, ed. *The Defense of the Roman and Byzantine East* (Oxford: BAR International Series 297 (i), 1986).

²⁴⁷ AM, XXIV, 2.1, 2.7, 3.1, 3.7, 4.1.399-449.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., XXIV, 4.2, 431; J.C. Coulston, 59-75; and Bivar, 271-291.

²⁴⁹ A. Sh. Shahbazi. *Sassanian Army*. Iranian Chamber of Chamber. 2-3. http://www.iranchamber.com/history/sassanids/sassanian_army.php. Accessed December 10, 2012, 08:26.

²⁵⁰ Farrokh (2005), 23-24; Brain Todd Carey, *Road To Manzikert, Byzantine And Islamic Warfare 527-1071* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Books Ltd., 2012), 6-10.

of garrisoning the cities and fortified walls would lead to the development of professional infantry.

Finally the Persians deployed elephants in support of the *Savaran*. Elephants were important to the Persian method of warfare until the destruction of the Persian Empire by the Arab conquest.²⁵¹ While striking terror into Roman soldiers and horses, elephants were used to ambush and assault marching Roman columns and to provide high platforms for accurate archery.²⁵² Shapur used trained war elephants in all of his major battles and sieges and would have required access to a steady supply of these beasts from India.

Female Persian soldiers were reported by Roman sources. Zonaras notes that after a battle in 260 women dressed and armed like men were found among the Persian dead of Shapor I's army.²⁵³ Libanius notes that at the battle for Singara in 343 women had been conscripted as sutlers into the Persian army.²⁵⁴ These Roman observations are reinforced by Persian epic poetry that mentions women fighting as *Savaran* knights. Gurdafarid, daughter of Gazhdaham, was one of the heroines of the *Shahnameh* (The Book of Kings) written in the 10th century but referring to pre-Islamic events. Gurdafarid fights a duel in defense of the fortress of *Sepid* against warlord Sohrab who was leading an invading army. She fights mounted in full *cataphract* armor with bow, *kontos*, sword, and Roman helmet. Gosasb Banu, daughter of the Persian hero Rostam, was another Persian heroine who fought as a *savar*. She is the heroine of an epic poem entitled *Banu Gošasb-nama*, written by an unknown poet between the fifth and sixth century (or eleventh and twelfth century). Sir Richard F. Burton's translation of *The Book Of The Thousand Nights And A Night* tells the story of Princess Al-Datma who was "accomplished ... in horsemanship and martial exercises and all that behoveth a

²⁵¹ Carey, 60.

²⁵² Farrokh (2004), 201. Despite their size they were repeatedly used in ambush against Julian's army in June 363. See Chapter 10.

²⁵³ Zonaras, XII, 23, 595-596.

²⁵⁴ Dodgeon and Lieu, 181.

cavalier.”²⁵⁵ Epic poems are difficult to pin down to a specific period. Persian female *savar* disappear from western sources after the fourth century but remain in Persian tradition.

The known historical Persian and Parthian women *savar* include Sura (c. 213), daughter of Ardavan V, last king of Parthia; and Apranik (632) a Persian commander and daughter of Piran, general of King Yazdgird III. Female guerilla commanders against Islamic rule include Azad Deylami (c. 750); Negan (c. 639) and Banu, wife of Babak Khoramdin.²⁵⁶ Historic and legendary female *savars* were all daughters of members of the noble class.

Fourth and fifth century sources do not address the size of Shapur’s army. Later sources record Persian field armies ranging from 20,000 to 60,000 men. In 578, the Persians had 70,000 registered warriors.²⁵⁷ Most likely, this number represents the total number of *savaran* and not the levy infantry. There was no known basic building block of the Persian army such as the Roman legion. The Immortal Guard division (*Zhayedan*) numbered 10,000 *savaran*, but may not have been formed in the mid-fourth century. The 1,000 strong Guard Regiment, (*Pushtighban*) was stationed at Ctesiphon during peacetime. Ammianus noted that Shapur added a corps of the royal cavalry for a sunrise surprise elephant-cavalry attack on Jovian’s camp but the passage is unclear as to the size of this contingent.²⁵⁸ It is theorized that the Persians used the decimal system or organization with companies of 100, regiments of 1,000 and divisions of 10,000. Dr. Farrouk theorizes that Shapur’s regular central army consisted of 12,000 cavalry and infantry and would have been reinforced with regional forces.²⁵⁹ In 530 Procopius

²⁵⁵ Sir Richard F. Burton, trans., *The Book Of The Thousand Nights And A Night*, Story of Prince Behram and the Princess Al-Datma, online version, http://www.wollamshram.ca/1001/Vol_1/vol1.htm. Accessed September 29, 2012, 09:30.

²⁵⁶ Historic Persian Women, <http://mani.tk/queens.htm>. This article does not follow western scholarly protocols.

²⁵⁷ Farrohk, (2005) 43.

²⁵⁸ AM, XXV, 5.8-9, 521.

²⁵⁹ Farrohk, (2005), 5-7.

recorded that the Persians invaded Roman Mesopotamia with 40,000 cavalry and infantry, reinforced with 10,000 men from the Persian Nisibis' garrison. Based on fifth and sixth century precedents, it may be assumed that Shapur's field army, with the addition of feudal, allied and regional contingents numbered between 40,000 to 50,000 men, excluding garrison and frontier regiments.²⁶⁰ Like the Roman army, logistics would have limited the size of any Persian field army.

Persian tactical manuals have not survived. However the *Strategikon* provides descriptions of Persian tactics and analysis from the Roman sixth century perspective and would have applied to the tactics utilized by Shapur. For the most part Persians preferred planning and generalship to blind attacks. They stressed an orderly approach rather than a brave and impulsive one. They easily endured heat, thirst, and lack of food. They were formidable when laying siege and being besieged. They coped bravely with adversity, often turning adverse circumstances to their advantage. When giving battle in the summer, they took advantage of the region's heat to dampen the morale of the Romans, often delaying battle for extended periods of time.²⁶¹ The Persians were skilled adversaries often underestimated by the Romans.

²⁶⁰ *Procopius History of the Wars, Books I and II.* trans. H.B. Dewing (London: BiblioBazaar, 2007), 58; Howard-Johnson, 166-167; Lee 259-260; and A. Sh. Shahbazi, 2-3; Carey, 8-14.

²⁶¹ *Strategikon*, 113-115.

Chapter 6

Roman Active Defense, 337-350.

Shapur's first major military operation of the Nisibis War was a direct attack on the center of Roman Mesopotamia: Nisibis. If the attack took place in 337, as is argued here, the attack was a target of opportunity based upon the stalled Roman offensive and not pre-planned for a 337 campaign. The events of this siege are clouded by the sources, both religious and secular. There were three sieges of Nisibis (337, 346 and 350) of which the best documented were the sieges of 337 and 350. With the loss of Ammianus' account of the first phase of the war (337-350) it is difficult, but not impossible to analyze the strategy employed by Shapur and Constantius during this period. In 337 Constantius was nineteen years old and exercising his first independent command while Shapur, at twenty-eight, was an experienced field commander. As events unfolded during the first phase of the war Constantius and Shapur were evenly matched tactically, with Constantius being superior operationally and strategically

Constantius left the East in 337 to secure his throne leaving the Roman offensive in shambles. He probably took a detachment of the Eastern Field Army with him to support his claim to the throne. Shapur seized the opportunity to besiege the unsupported city of Nisibis. According to Theodoret's (c. 393-466) *Historia Religiosa*, and *Historia Ecclesiastica* (stripped of supernatural intervention) and the *Historica S. Ephraemi*, upon Constantine's death Shapur marched against Nisibis with a vast army composed of cavalry, infantry, and elephants. His combat engineers raised siege works including towers so his archers could shower arrows down upon the Romans defending the walls. Persian engineers undermined the city's walls and dammed the Mygdonius River. Then they dug dikes to direct the river against the cities walls. On approximately the 70th day of the siege, the water was released and the torrent struck the walls like a massive battering ram. Entire sections of the city wall collapsed into the river. The rampaging river passed through the city and knocked down the opposite wall as well. The Persian assault was postponed because the approaches to the breaches were impassable due to floodwater, mud, and debris. While the Persians paused, the Bishop Jacob of Nisibis prayed for deliverance as soldiers and civilians worked all night to block the breaches and

raised ballista positions to cover the approach to the damaged walls. By dawn both breaches were closed with a barrier high enough to stop a cavalry charge and required assault troops to use scaling-ladders. Shapur's army assaulted the breaches as Bishop Jacob and the 'blessed Ephrem' walked the walls praying and encouraging the defenders. The assault was repulsed and a few days later the Persians lifted the siege.²⁶² Significantly this was the first siege where Christianity had a significant impact on maintaining the morale of Roman soldiers.

Some historians discount the narrations of the siege due to the nature of the Mygdonius River and the topography of the area in the vicinity of Nisibis.²⁶³ But to do so disregards the sources as well as Persian capabilities. Such feats of military hydro engineering were recorded as early as the fifth century BCE during the capture of Babylon by Cyrus the Great and by the Chinese in the third century BCE.²⁶⁴ The control of lower Mesopotamia required an advanced understanding of hydro engineering techniques to build and maintain the irrigation canals without modern pumps. The excavations at Dura-Europos attest to the skills the Persian possessed in siege warfare.²⁶⁵

With Constantine's *Praesental* Army divided between his three sons, the Army of the East was unsupported by the rest of the empire. Julian stressed that Constantius controlled only one third of the empire's resources at the beginning of the war.²⁶⁶ With only these limited resources, Blockely concludes that the object of Constantius' foreign policy was to maintain the territorial integrity of the Roman Empire as set forth in the Treaty of 298.²⁶⁷ The means by which he executed this policy varied based upon a

²⁶² Christian tradition alleges Bishop Jacob defeated the Persian assault with the local mosquitoes and gnats. Theodoret, *Historia Religiosa* and *Historia Ecclesiastica*, in Dodgeon and Lieu, 165-168.

²⁶³ Ibid., 384, FN 6.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Simons James, *Excavations At Dura-Europos 1928-1937, Final Report VII The Arms and Armor and other Military Equipment*, (Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2004), 30-39.

²⁶⁶ Julian, *Or.* I, 18c.

²⁶⁷ Blockely (1992), 23.

realistic assessment of the available resources.²⁶⁸ Complete reliance upon the fortified zone would have handed the Persians the initiative, something no Roman of the time with an undefeated army would have willingly done. While a full-scale invasion of Persia was not possible, Constantius' operational plan included military and political offensive elements.²⁶⁹

Constantius' *Praesental* Army took to the field in 338 and reinstalled a Roman nominee to the throne of Armenia.²⁷⁰ Shapur's losses during the siege of Nisibis must have been heavy, since he did not take the field in 338 and declined a general engagement between 339 and 343. The alternative possibility was that Shapur was having problems on his northeast border and he and his field army were not in Mesopotamia, leaving the defense of the region to his local generals. A war of attrition was conducted during this period as skirmishes were fought mainly on Roman territory.²⁷¹ Finally, in 343/344 Constantius captured a small Persian city on the east bank of the Tigris and transported the population to Thrace while adding the title *Adiabenicus* to his official titles.²⁷²

The sacking and transportation of a Persian city may have goaded Shapur into action. In 343/344 Shapur attacked Singara. Constantius marched his army to Singara. Shapur must have attacked in the spring or early summer because, according to Ammianus, during late summer or fall there was insufficient water along the western approaches to the city to support a relieving army.²⁷³ The Libanus, Julian and Festus provide details of the battle. With minor differences Libanus and Julian, stripped of their

²⁶⁸ Ibid., 14-15.

²⁶⁹ Ibid., 14.

²⁷⁰ Barnes, 135-136.

²⁷¹ Blockely, 15-16.

²⁷² Julian, *Or.* I and Libanius, *Or.* LIX 176-179, 188 and 385 fn18 as translated in Dodgeon and Lieu.

²⁷³ Ibid.

artistic rhetoric and anti-Persian bias provide similar accounts of the battle, while Festus provides a key element to the battle's climax.²⁷⁴ The Persian army deployed by Shapur included Persian cavalry, horse archers, foot archers, heavy infantry, allies from their borders, underage levies and women conscripted as sutlers. The infantry levies were trained on the approach march.²⁷⁵ With such a large number of levies to provide labor, it is evident that Shapur was planning to besiege Roman cities.

Upon receiving intelligence of the Persian army's approach, Constantius instructed the *limitatio* to retreat and not oppose the Persian crossing of the Tigris and not raid their camp once they crossed the river. Constantius wanted to bring the Persian army into a decisive field battle because he held a major geographical advantage. The Tigris would have blocked a Persian retreat in case of a Roman victory and turned defeat into a complete Persian disaster. The Persian army built a fortified camp on the road between the Tigris and Singara while Constantius built his camp sixteen miles from the Persian camp, most likely in the immediate vicinity of Singara.²⁷⁶

Shapur, aware of his army's strengths and limitations devised a battle plan to capitalize on both. On the morning of the battle he deployed foot archers upon the battlements and on the hills surrounding his camp. He then formed his heavy infantry and savaran *cataphracts* in front of his battlements. The remainder of his cavalry, possibly under command of Shapur's son, rode the 16 miles to the Roman camp.²⁷⁷

On the morning of the battle, when the Romans observed the large body of the enemy approaching their camp, they marched out into battle formation. The engagement started mid-morning with the Persians and Roman cavalry and light infantry skirmishing using bows, javelins, and darts. As the Romans attempted to close to hand-to-hand combat the Persians withdrew. As the skirmish continued the Persians slowly withdrew

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ The sources indicated the camps were one hundred and fifty *stades* apart. One hundred and fifty *stades* equals approximately sixteen miles.

²⁷⁷ Zosimus I, 50, 2-4; Dodgeon and Lieu, 93.

toward their camp enticing the Romans to follow. While Julian and Libanius stated that the Persian were fleeing and the armored Romans ran after them, such dramatic statements are unrealistic. The Roman infantry carried up to sixty pounds of armor and weapons and running sixteen miles with this load is not realistic. The Persians enticed the Romans to cover the sixteen miles from the initial battle lines to the Persian camp. It would have taken the Roman infantry four hours, at four miles per hour to cover this distance during the heat of the day. It was a favorite Persian tactic to use the heat of the day to wear down the Romans.²⁷⁸

The Roman battle line arrived at the Persian Camp in the late afternoon. The fresh savaran *cataphracts* now took up the battle. As they closed with the Roman front line, *lanciararii* and other light Roman infantry charged out to meet the *cataphrates* in open order from the intervals in the Roman line and engaged the Persians in hand-to-hand combat with clubs.²⁷⁹ A *cataphracts*' armor protected horse and rider from edged weapons and arrows, but provided no protection from the blunt force of clubs. In 272 Aurelian's Palestine auxiliaries' were the first Romans recorded to use clubs against Queen Zenobia's *cataphracts*.²⁸⁰ In 312 Constantine's cavalry used clubs with metal heads to defeat Maxentius' *cataphracts*.²⁸¹ The clubs were effective at Singara as the skirmishing Roman infantry was able to dodge the *catphracts knotus* and swords and unhorse them with blows from their clubs. The Persians broke and rode back to their camp before the main Roman battle line engaged them in combat. During the confused fighting that followed Shapur's son was captured and executed. As night fell the Roman legionaries stormed the camp cutting down all in their path.

²⁷⁸ *Strategikon*, 113-115.

²⁷⁹ Standard Roman battle tactics. See: *Herodian of Antioch, History of the Roman Empire* (1961, 108-134 Book 4, Chapter XV, 1-4, Edward C. Echols, trans; http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/index.htm#Herodian_Roman_Histories. Accessed October 19, 2012, 08:12 ; and Ross Cowan, *Roman Battle Tactics 109 BC-AD 313* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2007), 9-10.

²⁸⁰ Zosimus, in Dodgeon and Lieu, 93-95.

²⁸¹ Elizabeth James, *Constantine the Great, Warlord of Rome* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Books, Ltd., 2012), 54-55.

The Roman army had been marching or fighting since morning in the heat of the sun. Constantius attempted to organize a pursuit of the Persians but failed to re-form his army due to their plundering the camp and search for water. During the confusion the Persians rallied east of the camp in the dark and formed a rear guard. The Romans discovered cisterns in the Persian camp and soon clustered around them. Torches or the burning Persian camp itself illuminated the Romans around the water points. The Persian archers posted upon the hills around the camp and the Persian rear guard loosed an arrow storm at the illuminated cisterns causing heavy Roman casualties. The Roman pursuit was abandoned and the Persians left the Romans in control of the field as they crossed back over the Tigris.²⁸²

The battle at Singara was technically a Roman victory because they held the field and prevented the Persians from successfully obtaining their objective. Roman casualties caused by dissolution of discipline made it a ‘pyrrhic victory.’ Operationally, Constantius demonstrated his superiority by enticing Shapur into a field battle with a river blocking a Persian retreat. The battle demonstrated that both Constantius and Shapur were skilled and resourceful adversaries. Both were evenly matched tacticians understanding the strength and weakness of the enemy and their own army.

The sources for the period 345-350 record very little activity on the part of Constantius and his *Praesental* Army. The battle at Singara did little to deter Shapur from his goal of recovering the territory lost in the Treaty of 298. Nisibis was besieged a second time in 346. In that year it is recorded that Constantius was in or around Antioch but made no attempt to lift the siege.²⁸³ The heavy Roman casualties at the battle of Singara could not have been server enough to knock Constantius’ *Praesental* Army out of contention. Ammianus hints at a defeat of Constantius after which he fled with a body of companions to the unguarded frontier post of Hibiuta.²⁸⁴ The date of this defeat is

²⁸² Dodgeon and Lieu, 181-190.

²⁸³ T.D. Barnes, “Imperial Chronology, A.D. 337-350,” *Phoenix*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (Summer, 1980), 160-166, 163. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1087874>. Accessed October 19, 2012, 10:10

²⁸⁴ AM, XXV, 9,3, 549.

uncertain and if it took place in this period, it would explain the Roman army's failure to intervene in the second siege of Nisibis. The details of the second siege have not survived. Shapur besieged Nisibis for seventy-eight days and then lifted the siege.²⁸⁵

Based upon the details that have survived, the Persian army apparently utilized the avenue of approach through Singara to attack Nisibis throughout the 340s. The Persians blockaded Singara again in 348. Aelianus, a member of the *Protector Domesticus* and most likely a *tribunus vacans* (staff officer), on his own initiative led the two recently recruited light infantry legions, the *Praeventores* and *Superventores*, on a nighttime raid of the Persian camp, slaying a great number of them in their sleep.²⁸⁶ There are hints from Ammianus that Singara fell to the Persians but the fortress city was not occupied and the Romans reoccupied the site and repaired the fortifications.²⁸⁷

In mid-January 350 Magnentius, an army officer of German descent (*laetus*) overthrew and murdered Constantius' brother, and co-ruler, Constans, in Gaul.²⁸⁸ Shapur invaded mid-Spring and besieged Nisibis for the third time. Constantius left the defense of Mesopotamia and the city of Nisibis to Count Lucillianus, a competent and respected officer. The sources do not identify the garrison, but it most likely included the *Limitanei* Legion *I Parthicae Nisibenae* and other *limitanei* units of the Ducate of Mesopotamia.²⁸⁹ There is no indication that Constantius sent Lucillianus any reinforcements from the field army. It is assumed that Shapur as was his custom in 359 and 360, upon his arrival before the walls of Nisibis tried to persuade the garrison to capitulate. The details of the siege are preserved by Julian, Theophanes, Libanius, Zosimus and a number of minor passages in other works.²⁹⁰

²⁸⁵ Dodgeon and Lieu, 191, 192.

²⁸⁶ AM, XVIII, 9, 3; Dodgeon and Lieu, 193, 386 fn 20 and fn 25; Barnes (1980), 164.

²⁸⁷ AM, XIX, 2,8 and XX, 6.5.

²⁸⁸ Cromwell, 14; Zosimus, 58, Sozomen, 146,147.

²⁸⁹ The term 'Nisbenae' was probably a battle honor earned during the siege of 350.

²⁹⁰ Dodgeon and Lieu, 193-206; Lightfoot (1988), 119-122.

The Persians besieged the city for between 100-160 days. The Persian engineers used every siege tactic, which Count Lucillianus successfully defeated. Finally the Persian engineers brought down a section of the wall by a novel, and unclear use of the Mygdonius River. Unlike the first siege where the River Mygdonius was dammed and then unleashed against the walls, Julian records in his oration that the Persians created a lake around the city and used boats with siege engines to knock down the wall on one side. Unlike the first siege, as the walls fell, the Persian assault troops, supported by a mass of war elephants, immediately entered the breach and were met by the desperate garrison fighting to hold the breach. Hand-to-hand combat, support by arrows and bolts from the walls and towers checked the Persian assault, and panicked the elephants, while a sortie from a gate forced the Persians to withdraw. Shortly after this failed assault, the Persian Army lifted the siege and retreated after suffering heavy casualties from combat and disease. The lifting of the siege represented a humiliating defeat for the Persians. They had taken advantage of a favorable opportunity when the *Limitanei* Army of Mesopotamia was unsupported to attack the fortress. The garrison showed a remarkable degree of resistance, both physical and psychological, to the Persian onslaught.²⁹¹ Constantius lingered in Antioch while the siege played out, and may have visited the city after the siege was lifted before marching west to confront Magnentius. The Army of the East made no attempt to intervene at either the strategic or operational level. Constantius needed his *Praesentalis* Army and reinforced with Eastern units to protect his throne. After the siege concluded, Constantius and his army crossed over into Europe. Politically out-manoeuvring Ventrano, a second contender for the throne, the Pannonian Army joined Constantius. After failing in his third attempt to capture Nisibis, Shapur appears to have abandoned all hope of capturing the city by direct assault.

It was difficult for Shapur to maintain the sieges for longer than 160 days as he was hampered by the need to provide food and fodder for his army. By expanding his army with large numbers of levies and conscripts to provide the labor for the sieges he greatly expanded the supply requirements. The sources indicate that sieges lasted from 70-160 days. This appears to be the maximum time that the Persian army could remain stationary. At the end of this period the Persians would have consumed all foodstuffs

²⁹¹ C.S. Lightfoot (1988), 105-125.

within a region and the besieging army would have starved.

During this period Shapur employed the direct approach and fought in accordance with the Roman defensive plan. Even when Constantius' *Praesental* Army was defeated, the fortress cities disrupted communications and supply routes to the Persian army besieging Nisibis. Shapur failed to learn from his mistakes during this phase of the war and blindly continued 'banging his head' against the walls of Nisibis.

Chapter 7

Stalemate 350-358

As historian James Howard-Johnston observed, the Sasanians fought their way to power in the third century during benign geopolitical circumstances. The era of Kushan domination of the Eurasian steppes was ending. The rulers of the eastern approaches to Persia from the Oxus River to Bactria, could not successfully contest its expansion. Persia had no rival in the east until the appearance of the Huns in the middle of the fourth century.²⁹²

A Han uprising in 349 led to genocidal slaughter of the Huns (a.k.a. Xiongnu and known as the Chionitae by Ammianus) and pushed them west out of the Chinese sphere of influence onto the steppes northeast of Persia.²⁹³ By 350 the leading edge of the Chionitae were raiding into the Persian sphere of influence and were such a serious problem that Shapur was forced to suspend his operations against Rome without a negotiated truce and concentrate his empire's military power for the campaign years 351-358 against the Chionitae incursion. Persian military operations in the west were left to the initiative of local commanders.²⁹⁴ During this period Persian and allied Saracens raids continued to disrupt life in Roman Mesopotamia.²⁹⁵ Other historians conclude that because Ammianus did not report raids into Mesopotamia by Persia there must have been a truce. However, Ammianus admits that he only recorded events of significance. He omitted details regarding small Germanic war bands that overran Gaul between 354-357

²⁹² James Howard-Johnson, "The Sasanian Strategic Dilemma," *Commutatio et contentio, studies in the Late Roman, Sasanian, and Early Islamic Near East; in memory of Zeev Rubin*, (Du"sseldorf: Wellem, 2010), 37-70, 41.

²⁹³ Howard-Johnson (2010), 41-42.

²⁹⁴ Ammianus describes the Persian attempt to raid the market town of Batnae in 354. AM, XIV, 3.1-4, 25-27; and B.H. Warmington, "Objectives and Strategy in the Persian War of Constantius II," *Limes : Aken des XI Internationalen Limeskongresses* (Budapest:Akademiai, Kiado, 1977), 514.

²⁹⁵ Church historians relate tales of Saracen brigands disrupting live in Mesopotamia. See Irfan Shahid, *Byzantium and The Arabs in The Fourth Century* (Washington D.C.: Harvard University Press, 2006) 284-293; AM, XIV, 4.1-7,27-29.

and completely ignored the Saracen Queen Mavi's revolt in 376. Based on his silence it may not necessarily be concluded that an unofficial truce descended upon the Roman East between 350-358.²⁹⁶

The appearance of the Chionitae and the Hunnic Confederation altered the balance of power between Rome and Persia and presented a strategic dilemma to Shapur and his successors. Like Rome, Persia faced an established empire on one-border and a series of hostile nomadic confederations on the other. Unlike the Romans, there was no natural defensive terrain such as the Rhine and Danube on the Persian northeastern frontier and that frontier was longer and more porous than the Roman European *Limes*. The only solution to this dilemma was to make a lasting peace with one adversary.²⁹⁷ Shapur made peace with the Chionitae; while his successors made peace with Rome.

The Chionitae had two avenues of approach into Persia. The first and most direct was along the main caravan route from Samarkand to Persia's eastern most outpost the fortified city of Merv (a.k.a. Marv). The wall around the Merv oasis was almost 150 miles in length. Strabo attributes construction of this wall to Antiochus I son of Seleucus (who reigned c. 281-261 BCE). Chosroes I (531-579) most likely repaired these walls after the fourth century.²⁹⁸ Even without the long walls, the fortifications at Merv would have been difficult for the Chionitae to contend with in their weakened state. Historian Tourai Daryaee argues that Shapur campaigned in this region based on a passage by al-Tabari that mentions Shapur establishing cities in Sind and Sistan that confirms his rule over this region.²⁹⁹ Ammianus supports al-Tabari's statement when he lists the provinces of Persia as "... Scythia at the foot of Imaus (Himalayas), and beyond the same mountain,

²⁹⁶ AM, XXVI, 1.1-2, 565-567.

²⁹⁷ Howard-Johnston (2010), 43.

²⁹⁸ Richard Nelson Fry, "The Sassanian System of Walls for Defense," *Studies in Memory of Gaston Wiet*, (1977), 7-15.

²⁹⁹ In his translation of *The History of al-Tabari, Volume I*, Bosworth indicates that these accomplishments were wild claims. It would have been unlikely that Shapur build a city in a disputed region with the Saka and almost impossible to have built a city in the Indian province of Sind. al-Tabari, 65 fn179.

Serica, Aria, the Paropanisadae, Drangiana, Arachosia and Gedrosia.”³⁰⁰ Daryaee’s argument is also supported by numismatic evidence. A large percentage of gold coins produced during Shapur’s reign came from eastern mints such as Merv and a large number of his copper coins originated from Sakastan/Sistan and Kabul during the same period.³⁰¹ Finally, in all of Shapur’s major battles and sieges with Rome he relied on war elephants. This indicated that he had obtained a secure land route to India.

The second avenue of approach followed the Oxus River to the Caspian Sea and then turned south into the Persian settlements south of the Gorgan (a.k.a. Gurgan) River. The Persians were heavily engaged against the various nomadic confederations on the Gorgan steppes in the fourth-sixth centuries. Under Yazdegird II (438-457) forts were built to protect this region. His son Peroz (459-484) continued fighting in the region and was recorded building a fortified town in the vicinity of Abiverd named Shahr-(ram)-Peroz.³⁰² Against this threat, in the late fifth or early sixth century, Persian kings constructed the Gorgan Wall (a.k.a. The Red Snake). This wall ran from the Caspian Sea to the modern town of Gumishan in the Elbarz Mountains. This massive brick fortification ran 195 kilometers and included a canal five meters wide that flowed along most of its length. This canal provided water to the brick kilns situated along the wall. There were over 30 forts spaced along the wall and a number of larger supporting forts south of the wall. The barracks capacity for the fortified zone has been estimated at 15-36,000.³⁰³ The fact that later Persian kings expended massive resources of men and material to this stretch indicates that this was the gateway into the Persian heartland and may have been under constant threat from the mid-fourth century.

³⁰⁰ AM, XXIII 6.14, 357.

³⁰¹ Tourj Daryaee. *Sasanian Iran (224-651 CE)* (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 2008) 47-48; AM, XXIII.6.14, 357.

³⁰² Fry, 13.

³⁰³ Jebrael Nokandeh et. al., “The Enigma of the Red Snake, Revealing one of the World’s Greatest Frontier Walls,” *Current World Archaeology*, No. 27, (February/March 2004), 12-22; Jebrael Nokandeh et. al., “Linear Barriers of Northern Iran: The Great Wall of Gorgan and the Wall of Tammishe,” *Iran*, Vol. 44 (2006), 121-173.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/4300707>. Accessed October 10, 2012, 11:15.

Roman records of the events between 350-358 have survived. While the years 350-353 are a bit clouded, beginning in 354 the main contemporary historian, Ammianus, provided details of the Roman crisis. Constantius faced a more serious dilemma than Shapur. Constantius was forced to change his strategy in the East from an active defense to a passive defense relying upon the strength of the border fortifications.³⁰⁴ While Shapur marched east to protect his subjects, Constantius marched west to protect his throne.

By early September, 350 Constantius had bullied one contender from the field (Vetranio, Constans' former *magister peditum*) and merged the *comitatus* armies of Thrace and Pannonia with his *Praesental* Army. As reported by the twelfth century historian Zonars, Constantius fielded 80,000 men against the usurper Magnentius' Gallic Army numbering only 36,000. Constantius appointed his nephew Gallus (Flavius Claudius Constantius Gallus 325/6-354), brother of the future emperor Julian, to Caesar and sent him to the East. He appointed the very capable *Magister Equitum* Ursicinus and Count Lucilhanus to oversee military operations in the Orient.³⁰⁵ Magnentius was enticed out of the Alpine passes leading into Gaul and onto the plain of Pannonia where Constantius' numerical superior army and cavalry had the advantage. On September 28, 351 the two armies engaged along the Mursa River.

While Constantius was reported to have had 80,000 men in his army, it is unlikely that they were all massed at the battle of Mursa.³⁰⁶ Julian's *Oration II* provides the details of the battle.³⁰⁷ The Army of Gaul deployed with its left flank against the river in traditional fashion with infantry in the center and cavalry on the wings. Constantius'

³⁰⁴ B.H. Warmington. "Objectives and Strategy in the Persian War of Constantius II," 514.

³⁰⁵ Zosimus, 59; Thomas M. Banchich, "Gallus Caesar 15 March 351-354 A.D.," *De Imperatoribus Romanis*, 1997. <http://www.roman-emperors.org/gallus.htm>. Accessed October 25, 2012, 12:12 ; Warmington, 514.

³⁰⁶ Zonaras, 165.

³⁰⁷ Julian, "Oration II, The Heroic Deeds of Constantius," Wilmer Cave Wright, trans., *The Works Of The Emperor Julian Volume I* (London: Harvard University Press, 1913), 153-165.

army deployed in similar order, but his line being longer out-flanked Magnentius's unprotected and open right wing. As the armies engaged, Constantius' *cataphracts* supported by horse archers and lighter cavalry immediately routed Magnentius and his right wing. Then disaster struck! The Rebel Army of Gaul fought on instead of routing or surrendering. They were slowly pushed back at an angle and pinned against the river. Since they were on a flat plain they could not break contact due to Constantius' superior cavalry. Horse archers kept up a steady arrow storm. The *cataphracts* charged when a regiment attempted to move. The rebel battle lines broke up as their regiments locked shields and rallied on their standards. The rebel left wing cavalry, trapped against the river dismounted and fought with the infantry.³⁰⁸ It was reported that late in the afternoon, when the battle was clearly won Constantius rushed frantically to the scene of butchery screaming at the men from both sides to stop fighting; promising no reprisals. His efforts failed.³⁰⁹ As night fell the rebel regiments finally broke. Pinned against the river the Army of Gaul was destroyed. Of the 36,000 rebels engaged, 20,000 were reported killed with Constantius' losses reported to be 30,000.³¹⁰ The battle was a victory for Constantius but a disaster for Rome, especially to the Western Roman Empire's longevity. The loss of up to 50,000 trained Roman soldiers in the middle of a two front war greatly limited Constantius' options.

Constantinus' shortsighted policy to undermine the rebellion included encouraging the Franks and Alamanni along the Rhine to attack into the Province of Gaul that led to the collapse of the *limes*.³¹¹ The Gallic *limitanei* legions *I Minerva*, *XXX Ulpia*, *XXII Primigenia* and *VIII August*, reduced by drafts to form five *comitatenses* legions for the usurper's army could not hold the Rhine *limes*. By 355 the Franks and Alamanni were

³⁰⁸ Wilmer Cave Wright, Ph.D. Trans. *The Works of the Emperor Julian, In Three Volumes, Volume I, Oration II*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, The Loeb Classical Library, 1954, 149-157; Zonaras, 165.

³⁰⁹ Cromwell, 14; and Zosimus, 64.

³¹⁰ Zonaras, 165. The losses reported by Zonaras to Constantius's forces appear to be to high for a battle of this period. See also Potter, 472-476.

³¹¹ Zosimus, 64.

well established west of the Rhine.³¹² Constantius' action validates Isaac's argument that the emperor's primary interest was safeguarding his throne rather than preserving peace and prosperity for his subjects.³¹³

The situation in Gaul placed Constantius on the horns of a dilemma. He had three fronts that needed supervision: Gaul, the Balkans, and the East. His first solution for the East and Gaul failed miserably. In March 351 he appointed Gallus Caesar and dispatched him to the East. Since Gallus had no experience in military or administrative matters Constantius handed military operations to Ursicinus, the *Magister Equitum*. Unprepared for the responsibilities of a Caesar, Gallus abused his authority. The Jews of Diocaesarea took up arms and invaded Palestine. Gallus was at Antioch and sent Ursicinus to brutally suppress the revolt but in the process he destroyed Diocaesarea. Gallus then killed Domitian, Prefect of the East because he reported Gallus' misrule of the East to the emperor. Gallus was recalled and killed in 354.³¹⁴

Constantius' solution for Gaul was to appoint Silvanus, *Magister Peditum* for the region (352-355). A skilled soldier, Silvanus revolted in 355 due to fear of execution caused by slanderous statements being leveled against him at court. The threat of revolt was eliminated when Ursicinus was ordered from the East and had Silvanus killed. Ursicinus then replaced Silvanus.³¹⁵ The fact that Constantius was willing to entrust the command of the East to a count at this time indicates the situation in the East was viewed as stable.³¹⁶

With his brothers dead, and the majority of his extended family killed, Constantius appointed his scholarly nephew Julian to be Caesar in the west. By appointing Julian as a figurehead, Constantius planned on his experienced generals to occupy the Germans with the limited forces available until he could personally appear with his main army rectify

³¹² Cromwell, 14.

³¹³ Isaac, 416.

³¹⁴ Sozomen, 153; Potter, 474-476.

³¹⁵ AM, XV.5, .13.; Potter, 476-483.

³¹⁶ Warmington, 514; and Blockely (1992) 21.

the situation in Gaul. Unexpectedly Julian quickly bloomed into a natural general and administrator. Shortly after Julian arrived in Gaul in 356/7, Ursincinus (with Ammianus on his staff) returned to the East. Between 356-359 Julian reorganized the army of Gaul, defeated the Germans, rebuilt and reoccupied forts along the Rhine and reorganized the tax system within the region. In a short time Julian developed into a talented general and administrator and was perceived as a threat to the throne.³¹⁷

In 358, Musonianus, Praetorian Prefect of the East (354-358) was aware of Rome's difficulties in the west and Persia's difficulties in the east. He approached the Persian western commander, Tamsapor, to open negotiations for a truce. It is unclear when the Roman traitor Antoninus crossed to the Persian side of the frontier, but either Antoninus or other intelligence sources provided Tamsapor with reports of heavy fighting along the Rhine and Danube. Tamsapor viewed the offer as a sign of weakness and forwarded the offer to Shapur who agreed with Tamsapor's assessment.³¹⁸ Unbeknownst to Musonianus, Shapur had concluded his eastern war with a treaty and alliance with the Chionitae.

Based upon Musonianus' report, Ursincinus was assigned to oversee the peace negotiations with the Persians.³¹⁹ In 358, Shapur sent an embassy to Constantius reiterating the traditional Sasanid demands for all of the former Achaemenid territory but insisting that Armenia and Mesopotamia be returned to Persia. Constantius rejected the demands and warned Shapur not to be misled by the Roman defensive strategy. In early 359, Constantius sent an embassy back to Shapur, lead by Procopius, a tribune and notary, to keep negotiations open.³²⁰ Embassies served a number of functions in addition to delivering political messages and the negotiations of peace agreements and trade

³¹⁷ While Julian's governing skills can be explained by his academic studies, his reckless bravery in battle indicates he was confident in his ability with a sword and spear. Clearly someone trained him in the Roman martial arts before he was appointed Caesar in the West, even though there is no record of that fact.

³¹⁸ Blockley (1992), 19-20.

³¹⁹ Warmington, 515.

³²⁰ Ibid.

treaties. They provided ground reconnaissance and gathered military and political intelligence.³²¹ In 359 Procopius discovered Persian war preparations and sent Ursicinus a warning that there were Persian troop movements toward the frontier.³²²

Ursincinus was recalled to court in 359 on the pretext of consulting on the Persian activities and to be promoted to *Magister Peditum in Praesenti*. It appears that Constantius intended for Ursincinus to command the main field army in a campaign against Persia. Sabinianus, possibly the former duke of Mesopotamia, was promoted to *Magister Peditum per Orientum*.³²³ This command relationship in the East caused considerable confusion, violated the principle of ‘unity of command’, and lead to near disaster for Rome.

³²¹ Lee, *Information and Frontiers*, 166-169.

³²² AM, XVIII, 1.26.1-2; Lee, 168.

³²³ Blockely (1992), 22-23.

Chapter 8

Roman Passive Defense 357-362

Upon Shapur's return to the Roman front, it became evident that he had matured as a general. Thanks to the records of Ammianus, we have sufficient details of Shapur's 359-361 campaigns to deduce his strategy. In 359, Warmington argues, Shapur's intent was to force a decisive field battle on Constantius by marching through the Mesopotamian fortified zone, crossing the Euphrates and striking into the Province of Syria.³²⁴ This may be an over-simplification of Shapur's true intent.

Historians continually ponder the eternal question of whether history makes great people or whether great people make history and how individuals can determine the course of history as well as the role of unexpected fortune. In 358, Shapur and the Persian war effort received critical assistance from an unexpected source, Antoninus, the financial officer of the duke of Mesopotamia. Antoninus was a staff officer but was also a merchant. Through dealing with some questionable persons he had acquired a large debt that was coming due. In fear for his life, he decided to defect to the Persians. To insure he would be well received, he complied details of the Roman defense in the East, including troop dispositions, war plans, location, and status of military supplies throughout the region. To avoid the *limitanei* border patrols Antoninus bought an estate on the Tigris River and moved his household to the border. He contacted the Persians, and with their assistance, crossed the river in the dead of night.³²⁵

Roman misfortunes were compounded by their own palace politics. Ursicinus was recalled from the East to take the position of *Magister Peditum in Praesenti* and Sabinianus, "...an elderly man of culture and wealth, but no soldier..." but popular with the palace eunuchs was appointed *Magister Peditum* in the East. Ammianus' assessment however, may have been biased. Sabinianus was Duke of Mesopotamia before being appointed to *Magister Peditum* and therefore would have had military and administrative

³²⁴ Warmington, 515.

³²⁵ AM, XVIII, 5.1-8, 427-433.

experience.³²⁶ Meanwhile Antoninus was escorted to Shapur at his winter palace and the traitor's information was incorporated into the Persian War plan.³²⁷

Ursicinus and his personnel staff (including Ammianus) were in the Province of Thrace when he received a letter from the emperor ordering him to return to the East. When Ursicinus was recalled to court, he would have been aware of the deteriorating situation along the Tigris River but did not travel west with due haste. When he received the order to return he rode with haste back to Antioch. Upon his return Ursicinus met with Sabinianus but the two men could not agree on a course of action to fight the Persians. Since the Persians had started raiding across the Tigris River as far as Nisibis, Ursicinus and his small personal staff rode for Nisibis.³²⁸

Ammianus does not clearly describe the command relationship between Ursicinus and Sabinianus. Sabinianus had taken over command as *Magister Peditum Orient*. Ursicinus was *Magister Equitum Orient* and therefore the junior general. Based upon the conflict between the two senior Roman commanders it is evident that the letter recalling Ursicinus did not clearly return him to command of the East. As events unfolded Ursicinus became the 'de facto' commanding general of the *Limiteani* armies Mesopotamia and Osroene, while Sabinianus continued as commander of the *Comitatus* Army of the East (which had been reduced in strength due to the civil war and wars along the Rhine-Danube *limes*). This arrangement violated a principle of war referred to as 'unity of command.' To ensure unity of effort, there must be one responsible commander.³²⁹ The Romans repeatedly violated this rule in late antiquity, but it was normally mitigated through cooperation between the appointed commanders. In this case however, the command relationship failed.

Ursicinus was left to counter Shapur's campaign without support from Sabinianus. Ursicinus was a resident of Antioch and held his position of *Magister*

³²⁶ Shahid, 284-285.

³²⁷ AM, XVIII, 5.6, 431.

³²⁸ Ibid., XVIII, 6.5-8, 437-439.

³²⁹ Stewart, 8.

Equitum of the Orient since 349. He probably participated in the fighting during the 340s.³³⁰ He would have been well informed about Shapur's prior methods of operation. The pattern Shapur developed during the 340s was to cross the Tigris just north of the Great Zab River in the vicinity of Nineveh, then march along the Roman road to Singara and strike north along the Roman roads to attack and besiege Nisibis. However during these campaigns, Singara was either taken or blockaded to prevent its garrison from attacking the Persian army supply and lines of communication. In the previous three sieges, Nisibis had been able, just barely, to withstand the Persian attack without the intervention of the Army of the East.

Ursicinus had a small maneuver force in the province of Mesopotamia. The Gallic legions *Magnentius*, *Decentius* and XXX *Ulpia* were in the region but had not been assigned to any specific fortress.³³¹ There were two newly arrived *Equites* Illyrian regiments with a combined strength of 700 and the *comites sagittarii* cavalry regiment (elite field army barbarian horse archer unit).³³² These units may have been part of the four levies of excellent infantry; three levies of mediocre infantry and two levies of distinguished cavalry sent by Julian to the East prior to his rebellion.³³³ Finally, Count Aelianus and his light legions *Superventores* and *Praeventires* were in the region but

³³⁰ AM, XVIII, 6.1-3, 435; and Henry T. Rowell, *Ammianus Marcellinus, Soldier-Historian of the Late Roman Empire*, (Ohio: University of Cincinnati, 1964) 23.

³³¹ Ibid., XVIII, 9, 1-9, 443-467. The legions of the usurpers Magnentius and Decentius had been post to the east after the civil war for disloyalty and ill discipline. Ammianus is unclear whether the regiments *Superventores* (scouts) and *Praventores* (Skirmishers) were infantry or cavalry. The term *superventores* is used repeatedly by Ammianus for soldier conducting reconnaissance as scouts. Ammianus indicates that they were legions not cavalry. Neither regiment is recorded on the eastern section of the *Nottitia Dignitatum*. See Dodgeon, 193, 340-347. Legion XXX *Ulpia* may have been destroyed in 355 when the Rhine *limes* collapsed, since it disappears from history at this point. Since historians have identified only one XXX Legion and that is XXX *Ulpia*, the detachment at Amida was probably sent East some time before 355. Cromwell, 14.

³³² Ibid., XVIII, 8, 1-4, 457; and XVIII, 9, 1-9, 463-467.

³³³ Julian, "Letter To The Athenians," *The Works of The Emperor Julian*, Vol. II, 273.

unassigned to any specific city.³³⁴ Ursicinus had a mixed *comitatus* and *limitanei* maneuver force of three heavy legions, two light legions, and three cavalry regiments in the fortified zone.³³⁵ Ursicinus did not have the combat strength to oppose Shapur's main army in the field or even engage a large raiding party, but he did have sufficient reserves to reinforce a fortress that was projected to be attacked by Shapur.

Ursicinus had good observation throughout the Province of Mesopotamia. From the Roman headquarters at Nisibis observers could see the signal beacon of Singara on top of Sinjar Ridge, a distance of 75 miles. From Mardin, the entire Kahabur River Valley could be observed.³³⁶ Obviously details of small groups could not be distinguished without modern optics, but the dust cloud of the movement of 30-50,000 men and tens of thousands of animals moving as a group as well as their camp fires at night could easily be distinguished. While some enemy movement could be detected the main Persian army had not been observed. Persian cavalry was raiding up to the gates of Nisibis and scouts and spies had penetrated as far west as the Euphrates River.

In an attempt to locate the Persian main body, Ammianus (escorted by a centurion) was sent to Jovinianus, the semi-independent governor of Corduene and a friend of Ursicinus. Corduene was one of the Trans-Tigris areas ceded to Rome by the Treaty of 298, but in 359 was under Persian influence. The Roman cavalry regiment; *Ala quintadecima Flavia Carduenorum* was most likely recruited from this region. Jovinianus sent Ammianus, to a lofty observation post where he could observe 50 miles south along the Tigris River. On the third day he spied the Persian army marching north. In Ammianus history he provided a detailed description of the Persian array. While he would not have been able to observe these details from his observation post he could observe the Persian Army's dust cloud and campfires. Ammianus observed the Persian

³³⁴ Ibid., XVIII, 9, 1-9, 463-467.

³³⁵ This force had a maximum strength of 6,500 but was most likely under strength. See Terence Coello, *Unit Sizes in the Late Roman Army* (Oxford: BAR Series 645, 1996), 23.

³³⁶ The fortress city of Mardin sits atop a mountain overlooking Nisibis-Amida road. See A. Poidebard, "Les routes anciennes en Haute-Djezireh," *Syria, T. 8, Fasc. 1* (1927), 55-65, figures 1 and 2. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4195320>. Accessed July 19, 2012, 08:12

army as it began to cross the Tigris at Nineveh and estimated it would take three days for the army to cross. Ammianus returned to Jovinianus and quickly reported to Ursicinus.³³⁷

Based on the intelligence supplied by Ammianus, Ursicinus apparently concluded that Shapur planned to attack Nisibis. At a steady rate of advance of 15 miles a day the Persian main army required ten days to reach the Khabur River from the Tigris. Orders were sent to Duke Cassianus and Governor Euphronius of Mesopotamia to move their peasants with their households and flocks to safer quarters; to abandon the weakly fortified city of Carrhae; and to set fire to the fields and grasslands to prevent the enemy from foraging for fodder. Military units were sent to the fords on the Euphrates to defend with field fortifications supported by artillery.³³⁸ The grain was reportedly dry enough to be consumed by fire which indicates that it was late May or early June when Shapur attacked. Sabinianus and his army did not take part in the preparation of defenses east of the Euphrates River, as he was reported to have been in Edessa, drilling his army. Edessa would have offered a perfect fortified blocking position from which to defend the approaches to the main crossing of the Euphrates at Zeugma.³³⁹

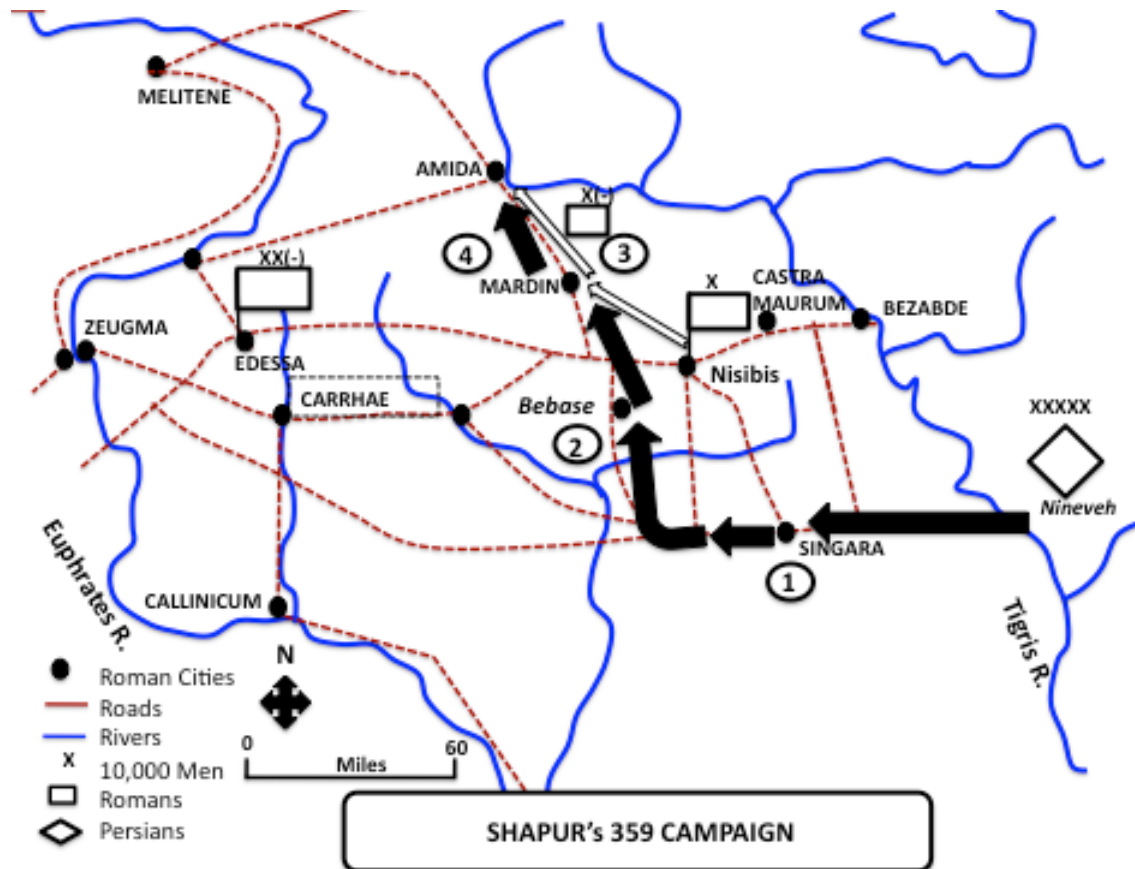
Shapur advanced up the Roman road from Singara to the base of the mountains in the vicinity of the town Bebase, a 12 days' march from the Tigris. Shapur paused while his scouts reconnoitered the routes to the Euphrates.³⁴⁰ Bebase was near a major road junction on the Khabur River. Bebase was 160 miles east of the main crossing of the Euphrates at Zeugma/Apamea and about 30 miles west of Nisibis. From that location Shapur had three options. His first option was to turn east and attack Nisibis. This was his standard campaign plan during the 340s. Ursicinus' actions in burning the nearby fodder rendered this option untenable. In any event this option would not have resulted

³³⁷ AM, XVIII, 7.1-7, 449-457.

³³⁸ Ibid., XVIII., 7, 2-8, 451, 453.

³³⁹ Ibid., XVIII, 7, 5-8, 453; and R.C. Blockley, "Ammianus Marcellinus on the Persian Invasion of A.D. 359," *Phoenix*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (Autumn, 1988), 244-260, 255, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1088346>. Accessed July 19, 2011, 08:12

³⁴⁰ Ibid., XVIII, 7, 8-11, 455.



Map 6³⁴¹

in a decisive defeat of the Roman Eastern Field Army. It had not resulted in luring the Roman Army into taking the field in the past; and even if the siege was successful the Roman fortresses of Singara, Amida, Bezabde and Castra Maurorum still commanded the lines of communication back to Persia. Shapur's second option was to take the bridge over the Euphrates at Zeugma/Apamea and attack into Syria. Despite the flooding, Ammianus indicates that the bridge was still up but the Army of the East blocked this route. Ursicinus had not yet ordered this bridge demolished. To capture the bridge, the Persians had to contend with a small Roman force at Zeugma on the west bank and the

³⁴¹ 1. Shapur's advance to Bebase. 2. Shapur's halt at Bebase to consider his option. 3. Roman force march to Amida. 4. Persian attack of Amida and supporting forts.

relatively small Army of the East at Edessa could have quickly withdrawn to Zeugma had Shapur marched west. Capturing the bridge by surprise was unlikely since the Romans were on alert due to the Persian raiders rampaging over the countryside. Fighting to cross a major river was not the type of field battle that Shapur was seeking.

Shapur's third option was to march north along the Roman road to Amida into the Province of Cappadocia. Ammianus records that Shapur choose this course of action when the scouts reported the Euphrates was in flood and impassable.³⁴² Antoninus, the traitor apparently advised Shapur that this option would allow the Persians to march into an intact region where they could forage for supplies.³⁴³

Ursicinus must have deduced Shapur's change of course, or scouts reported the Persian reaction to the flooded river. Ammianus does not report where Ursicinus' maneuver force was before it mysteriously appeared at Amida. It is too much of a coincidence that five legions just happened to be in the vicinity of Amida, with a battle-hardened count, when the Persians unexpectedly attacked north. This is especially odd, as Ursicinus initially believed that Nisibis was Shapur's target. These five legions were most likely in the vicinity of Nisibis, approximately 100 miles from Amida via the Mardin road. The maneuver force could have covered the distance in 5 days if they were marching the standard rate and following the standard Roman procedures or two days if they marched in light marching order and rested at Mardin for the night.³⁴⁴ Either way, the force reached Amida in sufficient time for Ursicinus to deploy the two *Equites* Illyrian regiments as a screen along the Nisibis road.³⁴⁵ The alternative would have been that the three Gallic legions wintered at Amida. If they had wintered over Ammianus would have would have counted them with V Parthia, as part of the garrison of Amida.

³⁴² Ibid., XVIII, 7.8-11, 455.

³⁴³ Ibid., XVIII, 7.8-11, 455-457.

³⁴⁴ Roman light marching order would be arms and armor with water and three days rations with only mules in their supply train.

³⁴⁵ AM, XVIII, 7, 8.1-4, 457.

A force of two *Equites* Illyrian regiments, 700 strong, failed to detect and report the Persian vanguard, reportedly 20,000 strong under the Persian general Tamsapor. Afraid of being attacked in the dark, the regiments pulled off the road to camp. As Ursicinus and his staff rode out of Amida in the early morning twilight, heading toward Zeugma and Capersana to ensure the bridges over the Euphrates had been broken down, they rode straight into the lead regiment of Tamsapor's vanguard. As Ursicinus' escort engaged the point of the Persian force, Ursicinus exchanged words with the traitor Antoninus. As more Persians joined the ensuing melee, Ursicinus' escort was scattered with Ammianus barely making it back to Amida. The surviving Romans were pursued to the banks of the Tigris, with Ursicinus escaping with a tribune and single groom.³⁴⁶

Tamsapor's vanguard established a cordon around Amida. The Persian main body marched up captured the Roman forts of Reman and Busan before proceeding to Amida. Shapur paused to take these forts because of the wealth abandoned by the fleeing population (and the presence of a beautiful woman, who was the wife of Carugasius, a leading citizen of Nisibis). Upon storming the forts he captured the lady along with a group of Christian nuns. He treated these upper class and religious women honorably.³⁴⁷ As the siege of Amida unfolded, he used the lady as leverage to turn Carugasius against Rome. However, unlike the traitor Antoninus, Carugasius was unable to provide Shapur with any useful information.³⁴⁸

A few days after Tamsapor isolated Amida, Shapur and the main Persian army arrived. Shapur did not intend to besiege Amida, but to bypass it. When the Persian ally King Grumbates of the Chionite, and his son boldly approached the walls of Amida to taunt the defenders, a ballista loosed a bolt killing his son. Persian traditions of honor required Shapur to take Amida to appease the king's thirst for vengeance.³⁴⁹ Yet

³⁴⁶Ibid., XVIII, 8, 4-7. 459.

³⁴⁷ The women of lower rank would not have received such honorable treatment. See A.D. Lee, *War In Late Antiquity, A Social History*, 141-146.

³⁴⁸ AM, XVIII, 10.-4, 467-469.

³⁴⁹Ibid., XIX, 1. 1- 2.12, 471-483.

Ammianus' explanation is too simplistic. Shapur apparently intended to penetrate into or beyond the fortified zone to bring the under-strength Army of the East to a decisive battle. Constantinus was tied down in Europe and the Army of the East was reduced by at least 10,000 soldiers from its full strength in 337-350. Failing to force the decisive engagement, the Persian planned to plunder the rich Province of Syria but the flooded Euphrates required a change of plan.

Historians overlook the fact that the first major Persian attack in the war was the destruction of Amida in 336/7. Shapur, like all kings and generals of late antiquity was interested in plunder but he knew that plundering Cappadocia or Syria would not have won the war. Such action would have placed his army deep in Roman territory with all exit routes controlled by *limitanei* fortresses. Amida was the gateway into Armenia for the Romans and the northern gateway for the Persians into Roman Mesopotamia. Shapur was well aware of its importance and by besieging Amida he had a realistic expectation that the Romans would march out and contest the siege.³⁵⁰

Without stripping the fortresses of their garrisons, Sabinianus realistically mustered no more than 20,000 men in the Army of the East. Ursicinus unsuccessfully tried to convince Sabinianus to actively campaign against the Persians besieging Amida. Ursicinus wanted light troops to harass the Persian besiegers. Sabinianus may have been operating on instructions from the emperor not to risk an open battle.³⁵¹ If Ursicinus had been in command, the Army of the East would have marched to relieve Amida and Shapur would have achieved a field battle on favorable terms.

The normal garrison of Amida consisted of the legion V Parthia supported by an unidentified cavalry regiment. A detachment from X Fortenses, the *limitanei* legion of Palestine was also present during the siege. This detachment was over three hundred miles from its home base at Aila in *Palestina Salutaris* and may have only numbered 300 men.³⁵² The small garrison was reinforced with the maneuver force and for the siege

³⁵⁰ Geoffrey Greatrex, *Rome And Persia At War, 502-532* (Leeds: Francis Cairns, 1998), 73-115.

³⁵¹ Ibid., XIX, 3, 1-3, 483-485.

³⁵² Coello, 25.

numbered 6,000 soldiers with 16,000 civilians. Arrayed against the defenders was initial the Persian vanguard of 20,000 which eventually (allegedly) was reinforced with the main army of 60,000 men.³⁵³

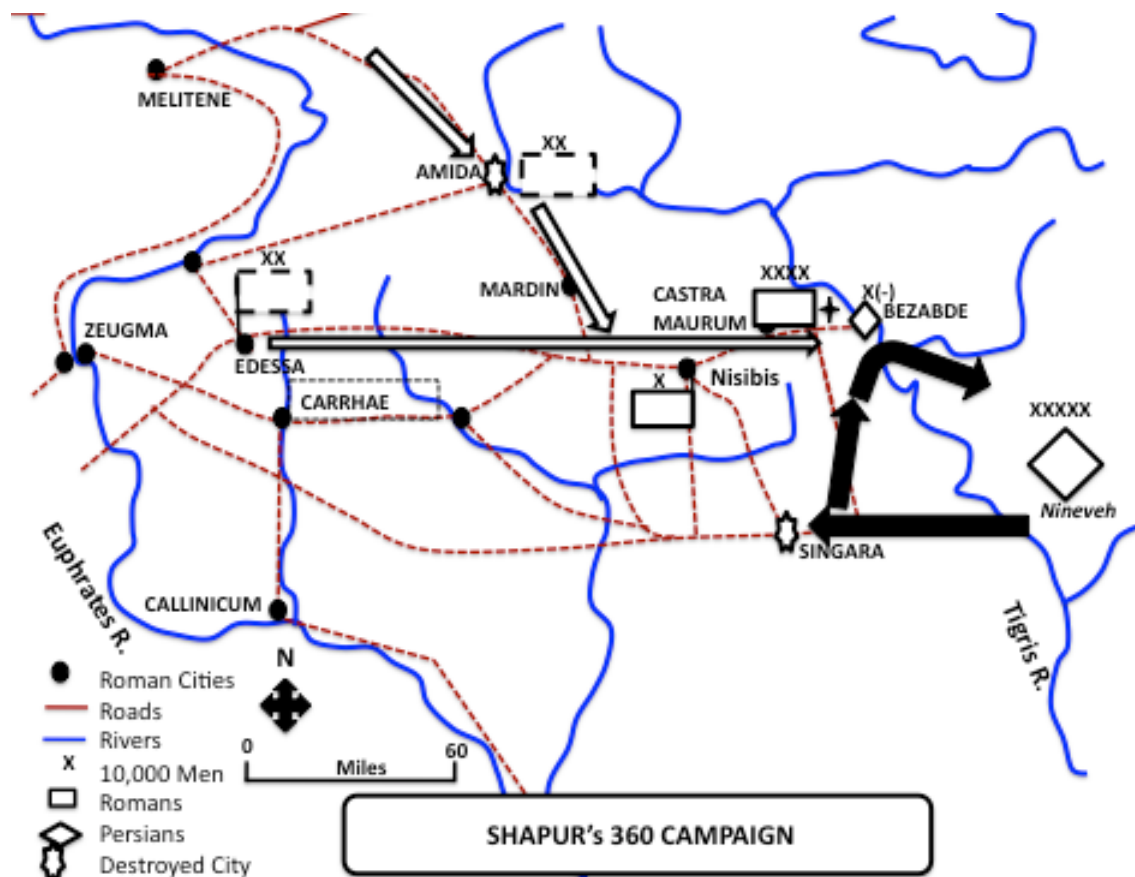
The siege lasted 73 days. Repeated assaults by the Persian Army were skillfully repulsed and the garrison made repeated sorties. On the seventy-third day, a mound the Roman's built behind their wall to counter the Persian siege ramp, suddenly collapsed. The cause of the collapse is not known, but it was most likely caused by a Persian mine. The rubble from the mound filled the gap between the city wall and the Persian ramp and presented the Persians an unhindered bridge into the city. The Persians assault troops immediately crossed over the wall before the Romans could stop them and the garrison was over-whelmed. The immediate follow on assault indicates that the collapsed mound was a pre-planned event by Persian engineers.³⁵⁴ Count Aelianus' skill at defending the city resulted in high Persian Army casualties (allegedly 30,000). After sacking and destroying the city, the Persian campaign culminated with the fall of Amida. Count Aelianus and his senior officers were executed and the survivors were lead across the Tigris River into slavery.³⁵⁵

With the withdrawal of the Persian army and the closure of the 359 campaigns, it first appeared the Persians had accomplished little. They caused havoc among the peasants of the region, disrupted trade, and sacked, but did not occupy one of the key fortress cities. The loss of a large part of the 359 harvests would have been hard on the peasants, but the Roman government could import supplies from Egypt to feed the army. Unnoticed by Ammianus, and modern historians, was Shapur's transformation in strategy from the direct approach (attacking Nisibis) to the indirect approach of isolating Nisibis.

³⁵³ Most historians give the garrison strength of 7-10,000 men. See R.C. Blockely, "Ammianus on the Persian Invasion of A.D. 359," *Phoenix*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (Autumn, 1988), 244-260, 258, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1088346>. Accessed October 19, 2010, 08:12 ; and Coello, 21.

³⁵⁴ The excavations at Dura-Europos indicted mines damaged a tower and sunk a wall. See James, 31-39.

³⁵⁵ AM, XIX, 1-8.12, 471-515.



Map 7³⁵⁶

The exact moment of Shapur's strategy transformation was not recorded. Ammianus unknowingly provides a hint when he notes: "(T)here was at the time in Corduene, which was subject to Persian power, a satrap called Jovinianus...to him I was sent... for the purpose of getting better information..."³⁵⁷ Corduene was one of the Trans-Tigris regions within the Roman sphere of influence. This note indicates that by 359 the region was already drifting back to the Persian sphere of influence. In addition, the Persian Army not only included the king of the Chionitae but also the king of the Albani.³⁵⁸ Shapur's

³⁵⁶ The black arrows demonstrate Shapur's successful Summer 360 attack into Mesopotamia. The white arrows represent Constantius' failed Fall 360 counterattack.

³⁵⁷ Ibid., XVIII, 6.20, 447.

³⁵⁸ Ibid., XVIII, 6.20-23, 449.

emissaries had been busy undermining Roman authority east and west of the Caspian Sea and cutting the northern trade route. It is debatable whether Shapur developed his indirect strategy during the planning phase of the 359 campaign, or as the 359 campaign unfolded, but it is clear that it was fully developed during the winter of 359/360.

As to Roman military operations during this campaign the evidence indicates that Constantius did not understand the nature of the new threat in the Roman East. He remained in Europe, and wintered in Constantinople.³⁵⁹ He ordered Julian to provide massive reinforcements in the form of specific legions and *auxilia* units and 300 man detachments from each of his remaining regiments.³⁶⁰ In the Spring of 360 Constantius moved to Caesarea in Cappadocia where he learned that Julian had been proclaimed Augustus by his army.³⁶¹ It is significant that at this point in time Constantius considered Shapur a bigger threat than Julian. Constantius moved in late spring or early summer to Edessa.³⁶² By deploying his army to Edessa at the beginning of the campaign season, Constantius was ready to intercept an anticipated attack by Shapur on Nisibis. His operational plan for 360 was reactive and based upon the assumption that Shapur would follow his operational pattern from the campaigns of the 340s.

Shapur opened his 360 campaign late in the summer with an attack on Singara. The Roman army could not march to the relief of the city because the timing of the attack coincided with the drying up of the water sources on the roads leading from Edessa and Nisibis.³⁶³ Singara was defended by legions or legionary detachments from I Flavian, I Parthia, and cavalry that had taken refuge within the city from the quick Persian advance.³⁶⁴ The siege raged for several days until a large battering ram was brought up,

³⁵⁹ Sozomen, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, 4.23, 4-7.

³⁶⁰ AM., XX, 4.2, 17.

³⁶¹ Ibid., XX, 9.1-3, 63.

³⁶² Ibid., XX, 13.1-16, 157-165.

³⁶³ Ibid., XX, 6.8-9, 39-41.

³⁶⁴ Ibid., XX, 6.8, 39.

and despite the defenders countermeasures, it collapsed a tower. After the initial assault into the breach, the defenders surrendered and the captured Roman soldiers were transported to remote parts of Persia.³⁶⁵

Instead of marching toward the Khabur River, as the Persians did in 359, Shapur unexpectedly countermarched his army to besiege Bezabde. Bezabde was a strong fortress defended by II Flavian, II Armenia, a detachment of II Parthia and Zabdiceni archers, and possibly the infantry regiment *Cohors quqrtadecima Valeria Zabenorum* (Zabdiceni). Shapur attempted to entice the garrison to surrender but was driven back by ballistae bolts. The Persians assaulted the city for a number of days. As casualties mounted the Persians deployed their great battering ram and broke into the city. A large part of the garrison escaped capture.³⁶⁶ After taking the city, Shapur rebuilt the defenses, stocked the city with supplies, installed a garrison, and moved on; taking a number of forts but unsuccessfully attacking the fortress of Virta. He then pulled back to the eastern side of the Tigris to await the Roman reaction.³⁶⁷

Shapur's 359 and 360 campaigns demonstrated his evolved knowledge of the art of war and the indirect approach to maneuver and siege warfare. Missed by western sources were the combined impacts of the loss and destruction of Amida in 359 and the loss at Singara and occupation Bezabde in 360. These attacks isolated the Trans-Tigris region gained by Rome in the Treaty of 298. They also secured lines of communications for an attack on Nisibis from the north, east and south and provided the Persians a forward logistics base at Bezabde. Also, by taking Bezabde late in the 360-campaign season, repairing its defenses, and garrisoning it quickly, Shapur denied Constantius the time required to recapture it before winter. Rome's prestige suffered from the loss of Bezabde and Constantius personally was humiliated by his inability to quickly recover the city.

³⁶⁵ Ibid., XX, 6.7, 39.

³⁶⁶ Ibid., XX, 7.14, 49. Unlike the legions and regiments at Amida, these units lived to fight against Persia for years and are found on the *Notita*.

³⁶⁷ Ibid., XX, 7.14-17, 49-51.

The Campaign of 361 was equally disastrous for Constantius. Initially, the Persian's mere presence on the east side of the Tigris prevented Constantius from besieging and retaking Bezabde. Julian's revolt caused Constantius to march west and Shapur stood down his army, winning the campaign without expending a single arrow. Ammianus records that Shapur's failure to cross the Tigris was due to bad omens.³⁶⁸ The facts, however, suggest that Shapur succeeded because Constantius failed to recapture Bezabde, which undermined his ability to rule the area. When Constantius marched west, after two years of Persian military successes, the Trans-Tigris regions as well as the kingdoms of Albania and Iberia returned to the Persian sphere of influence. Armenia alone remained free from Persian dominance.³⁶⁹

Constantius died on November 3, 361 at Mopsucrenae in Cilicia as he marched to confront Julian. Criticisms of Constantius' strategy are numerous in the near-contemporaneous sources. As early as 363, Libanius attacks Constantius' strategy as cowardly; both in the failure to fight battles and to relieve besieged cities.³⁷⁰ A decade later Eutropius summarized Constantius' reign, concluding he failed against the Persians and only succeeded in civil wars. While this was also Ammianus' opinion, he at least moderated his harsh judgment by including a statement attributed to Thereupon Sabinus, citizen of Nisibis, that; "Constantius... up to his last day he had lost nothing, whereas Jovian... had abandoned the defenses of provinces whose bulwarks had remained unshaken..."³⁷¹

³⁶⁸ Ibid., XXI, 13. 8, 161.

³⁶⁹ Warmington, 517.

³⁷⁰ Libanius, *Or.* XVIII, 206.

³⁷¹ AM, XXI, 16.15, 183; XXV, 9.2, 549.

Chapter 9

Roman Strategic Offense, 363

When Julian ascended to the throne in 361, he capitalized on Constantius' preparations for a major Persian offensive. Julian invaded Persia in March of 363, just eighteen months after assuming the mantle of sole emperor. A Roman emperor's first priority was to maintain power rather than defend the empire.³⁷² He had to earn and retain the army's loyalty in order to retain power. Peace meant boredom to the Roman Army with its accompanying low pay and limited advancement. Battle resulted in wealth and promotion.³⁷³ Julian was tired of inactivity, eager for glory and opportunity to avenge past wrongs committed by the Persians. He advanced preparations for a 363 campaign and ignored advice to the contrary.³⁷⁴

Blockely points out that Julian had enjoyed success in Gaul with a policy of confrontation, pursuit, and devastation against the Germanic confederations.³⁷⁵ Twenty-five years of war had convinced Julian that a decisive victory could not be achieved in the Mesopotamian or Armenian Theaters. Campaigning in these fortified zones resulted in costly, fruitless sieges. As a scholar, Julian would have studied earlier attacks on the city of Ctesiphon. He would have known that prior emperors had achieved victory by achieving two objectives: sacking Ctesiphon and defeating any Persian army that tried to intervene. But Julian had a third objective, which had eluded all previous successful Romans fighting Parthia or Persia. To obtain a decisive victory, Julian had to break into the Iranian Plateau and/or replace Shapur with a client king.

While Julian's intent to lead the attack on Persia was understood by his contemporaries, his strategic goals were unclear. The sources disagree as to whether Julian's intended operation was a larger version single campaign, similar to his raids

³⁷² Isaac, 376, 377.

³⁷³ Ibid., 380, 381.

³⁷⁴ AM, XXII, 12.1-4. 263-265.

³⁷⁵ Blockely (1992), 24.

across the Rhine against the Germans, or an attempt to overthrow Shapur and subjugate Persia to Rome. The fifth century Socrates suggested that Julian actually believed he was Alexander reincarnated, destined to extend the empire to India.³⁷⁶ The Persian Prince Hormisdas was one of Julian's commanders.³⁷⁷ The option of replacing Shapur, as Constantine had planned in 337, was a viable option. There is a reference in a letter from Libanius implying this was Julian's plan.³⁷⁸

Julian's army in June 363 marched north to the Diayala (Douro) River, which placed him in position to advance toward India through the Persian heartland. The main Silk Road followed Diayala River onto the Iranian Plateau and by June the passes in the Zagros Mountains should have been passable. This was axis of advance that Muslim armies used to break onto the Iranian Plateau and destroy Persia in the seventh century. After Julian's arrival at this strategic avenue of approach into the Persian heartland, it should have been no surprise that on about June 17, 363 Persian and Roman main armies clashed on the shores of the Diayala River.

While his strategic goals are cloudy, Julian's operational plan was surprisingly modern in concept and very similar to Constantine's plan in 337.³⁷⁹ Julian envisioned two forces attacking along separate axes, each initially threatening a key Persian region, eventually converging on the kingdom's capital: Ctesiphon. His forces would then mass and capture Ctesiphon. With the main Persian army defeated, the second phase would commence with the Roman army breaking onto the Iranian Plateau, ultimately replacing Shapur. It was projected that the *Praesental* Army, and the Army of Mesopotamia independently would have a reasonable chance of defeating the Persian Army in open battle. The main effort, under Julian, would attack down the Euphrates River to take the Persian capital. The supporting attack would cross the Tigris River, march through the Tran-Tigris regions, reestablish Roman rule and alliances, then move into Persian territory, marching east of the Tigris, and south toward Ctesiphon.

³⁷⁶ Blockely (1992), 26.

³⁷⁷ Zosimus, 75, 77.

³⁷⁸ Potter, 517.

³⁷⁹ Kaegi, 209-213.

The composition and size of Julian's *Praesental* Army is unclear. Zosimus was the only historian to reference the size of the army noting that when Julian reviewed the army in March 363 it mustered 65,000. Gibbon accepted this figure and added the Army of Mesopotamia's 20-30,000 men to the force for a total of 85-95,000 soldiers committed to the offense.³⁸⁰ A number of historians subtract the Army of Mesopotamia from Zosimus' 65,000, reducing the *Praesental* Army to 30-45,000, depending on which source they accept for the size of the Army of Mesopotamia.³⁸¹ If these numbers were accurate, Julian's army would have been between 35 – 47,000 in strength, and would have been insufficient to accomplish campaign objectives.

Assuming Vegetius' ratio of one horseman to four infantry, the *Praesental* Army would have contained 13,000 cavalry and 52,000 infantry. The cavalry consisted of regular Roman regiments supported by Goth and Saracen *federates* and rebel Persians.³⁸² The infantry consisted of Roman legions from Gaul, the Balkans, and the East as well as *auxilia* regiments of Gauls and Germans from the Rhine River Valley.

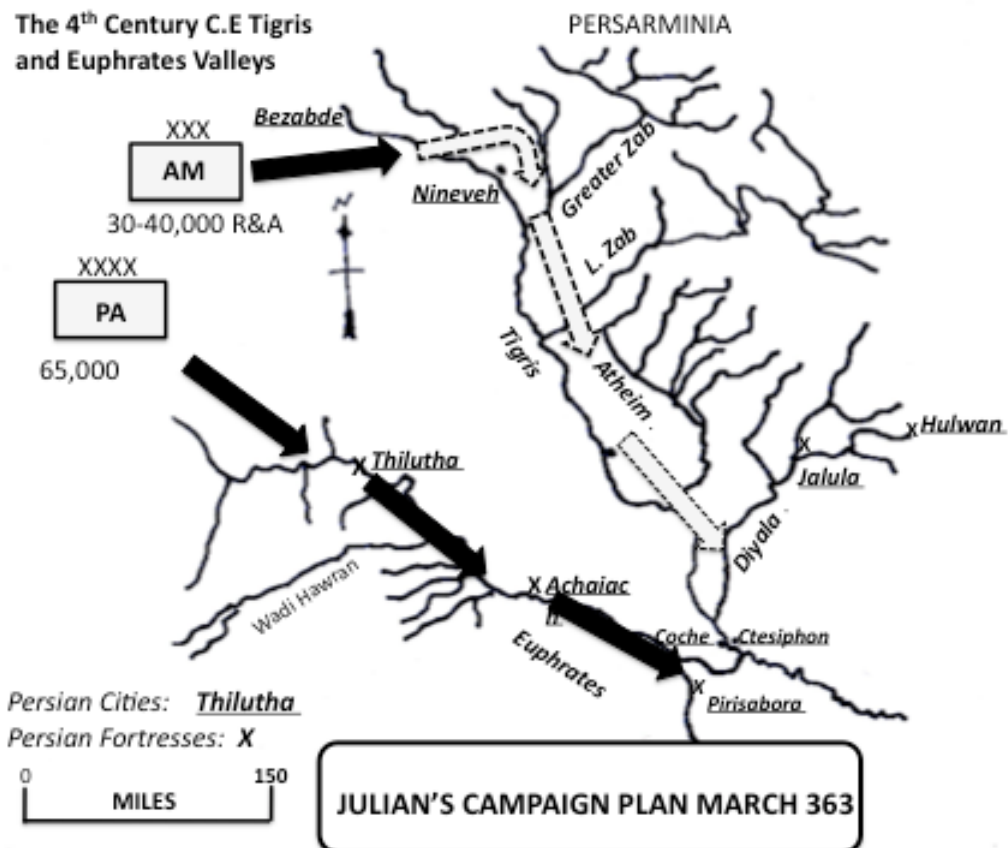
Until the *Praesental* Army marched south of Ciresium, the plan created a dilemma for Shapur; whether he should protect the Persian homeland, or protect Ctesiphon and prevent economic ruin. Until Julian marched south of Ciresium, there was the possibility that he could have turned east along the Singara road and invaded the Persian heartland. It would have been novel (and very un-Roman) had the Romans marched onto the Iranian Plateau without sacking Ctesiphon. It was also the most

³⁸⁰ Gibbons, 706-707 and 722.

³⁸¹ The sources are not clear whether this detached force was the Army of the Orient or an ad hoc formation of eastern and western units. Because the identity of the force is unclear, this thesis will follow Gibbon refer to this force as the Army of Mesopotamia. According to Ammianus this army was 30,000 men; Libanius claims it was 20,000 men; and Magnus claims it was 16,000 men. See Charles W. Fornara, "Julian's Persian Expedition in Ammianus and Zosimus," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, Vol. 111 (1991), 1-15, 9, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/631884>. Accessed October 19, 2010, 20:12

³⁸² By the fourth century *federates* were troops provided by client kings and chiefs from tribes and kingdoms along the *limes* that provided troops when called. They served under the own nobles and officers. Southern and Dixon (1996), 71-72.

dangerous course of action. The only source indicating Shapur's location in March 363 is Magnus, who places the Persian army in Persian Armenia not near Ctesiphon. Shapur had placed himself in a central location from which he could defend Bezabde, and block the route to the Iranian Plateau, or march to support the garrison of Ctesiphon.



Map 8³⁸³

Historians ignore the character and reputation of the two men selected to lead the Army of Mesopotamia: Procopius and Sebastianus. In 363 Procopius would have been 37 years old and had gone through life “innocent of blood shed.”³⁸⁴ He had risen to the rank of count through family connections to Constantius and Julian but, prior to 363, held no field command mentioned by Ammianus or other historians. While politically loyal to Julian, he lacked experience.

³⁸³ Julian's campaign plan as described Ammianus Marcellinus and Libanius.

³⁸⁴ Ammianus records that he was 40 years 10 months when he died in 366. AM, XXVI,9.1-8.

The key to Julian's plan was not his kinsman Procopius, but the seasoned, eastern soldier Sebastianus. By the time Sebastianus was selected co-commander of the Army of Mesopotamia he had been Duke of Egypt.³⁸⁵ The mid-fourth century list of dukes of Egypt identifies Sebastianus of Thrace as Duke of Egypt in 353-354.³⁸⁶ During his tenure, Emperor Constantius, an Arian Christian, was in conflict with the Alexandrian Christian church. Duke Sebastianus and his soldiers enforced the emperor's edicts.³⁸⁷ According to Athanasius (c. 296-373), Bishop of Alexandria, and foremost opponent of Arianism,³⁸⁸ Duke Sebastianus was a "...profligate young man."³⁸⁹ The key phrase is "young man." Romans considered men young until age thirty.³⁹⁰ To be appointed Duke of Egypt when he was in his twenties indicates Sebastianus was either well connected, had proven himself in the field, or both. Count Sebastianus was: "A true soldier, then: solicitous for his men; an aggressive officer, model of integrity, everything a military leader should be; therefore, rewarded with high commands by Constantius II, Julian, and Valentinian [I]..." and finally Valens.³⁹¹ There is no record of his activities between 354 and 363, but the fact that Julian gave him co-command of the Army of Mesopotamia indicated the emperor had great confidence in him.³⁹² The appointment of Julian's

³⁸⁵ Ibid., XXIII, 3.1-5.

³⁸⁶ Rev. A. Robertson, ed. *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, Series II, Vol. IV, Athanasius: Selected Works*. Online Edition. Par. 59.
<http://www.bible.ca/history/fathers/NPNF2-04/Npnf2-04-08.htm>. Accessed October 20, 2010, 20:45.

³⁸⁷ Lee, 199-202.

³⁸⁸ Dodgeon and Lieu, viii.

³⁸⁹ Robertson, Par. 59.

³⁹⁰ Henry T. Rowell. *Ammianus Marcellinus, Soldier-Historian of the Late Roman Empire* (Cincinnati: The University of Cincinnati, 1964), 22-23.

³⁹¹ Ramsay MacMullen. *Corruption and the Decline of Rome* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1988), 194.

³⁹² *Ammianus Marcellinus, The Later Roman Empire (A.D. 354-378)*, ed. Walter Hamilton (London: Penguin Books, 2004), 484.

kinsman, Procopius, assured that the ruling family would receive credit for Count Sebastianus' deeds.

Shapur would have been aware of the massing of 85,000 soldiers, 1,100 boats, and thousands of tons of supplies in the Roman East.³⁹³ By 363, Shapur would have had two years to consolidate his power over the Trans-Tigris princes.³⁹⁴ He would have been very aware of Persia's strength and weaknesses. The political center of gravity for Sasanian Persia was Mesopotamia and its capital Ctesiphon, but its military center of gravity was the Iranian highlands, where its military manpower was located. The main arteries for trade and military movement followed the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers south to Ctesiphon, then east across the Zagros Mountains into the Persian heartland. There are no records indicating whether the eastern Persian regiments wintered in Mesopotamia or whether they joined Shapur after the snow in the passes of the Zagros Mountains melted in June. Since the confrontation between the main Persian and Roman armies did not take place until June 363 it is most likely the eastern regiments did not winter in Mesopotamia.

There is some controversy in the primary sources as to whether Julian planned a two-pronged attack. On March 19, 363, the Roman *Comitatus* Armies were massed into one *Praesental* Army at Carrhae, standing ready for the invasion of Persia. As Julian made final arrangements for the invasion, exhausted scouts rode into camp and reported that Persian cavalry had crossed the Tigris River and were plundering Roman territory. Despite massive preparations, and contrary to the histories of Ammianus and oration of Libanius; Zosimus did not record that the mission of the Army of Mesopotamia was to attack Ctesiphon.

³⁹³ A.D. Lee. "Embassies As Evidence For the Movement Of Military Intelligence Between The Roman And Sasanian Empire." 455-461, 456-457, in Philip Freeman and David Kennedy, ed. *The Defense of The Roman and Byzantine East, Proceedings of a colloquium held at the University of Sheffield in April 1986* (Oxford: BAR International Series 297 {ii} 1986); and Lee (1993), 112-114 and 118-127.

³⁹⁴ Lightfoot, 190, in Mitchell.

Zosimus records that the emperor believed the Persians were only marauders. He reports Julian dispatched Procopius and Sebastianus with 18,000 men to guard the crossing of the Tigris with the limited mission of preventing the Persians from pillaging Nisibis.³⁹⁵ Zosimus' version reflects his opinion that the force lead by Procopius and Sebastianus was too weak to fight its way down the Tigris and link up with the *Praesental* Army. Ammianus and Libanius, contemporaries of the event, clearly state that the Army of Mesopotamia was to invade Persia and fight its way down to Ctesiphon.

Ammianus provides an eyewitness report; Julian, stung by reports of Persian raiding at once executed a plan previously formulated. Procopius and Sebastian, with 30,000 men, would march east, initially keeping to the west bank of the Tigris to guard the *Praesental* Army's open flank and protect Mesopotamia. They would then meet and merge with King Arsaces' Armenians, cross the Tigris, march through Corduene and Moxoene to lay waste to the Persian territory of Chiliocomum; finally linking up with the main army in Assyria.³⁹⁶

In Libanius' *Funeral Oration* for Julian, he stated that the detached 20,000 Romans were to be reinforced with 20,000 Armenians. This combined force was to invade Persia and chase the Persian Army out of its district, if they retreated, and bring them to battle if they stood their ground.³⁹⁷ Libanius agrees with Ammianus that Julian was expecting the Army of Mesopotamia and Armenians to join him at Ctesiphon.³⁹⁸ Had this army joined Julian, he would have had up to 85-95,000 men to besiege Ctesiphon.

Modern historians focus on the size of the Army of Mesopotamia instead of the mission and tasks it was assigned. Gary A. Crump assumes that the figures reported by

³⁹⁵ Zosimus, 76-77.

³⁹⁶ AM, XXIII, 3, 4-5.

³⁹⁷ Libanius. *Funeral Oration Upon The Emperor Julian.* Transcriber Roger Pearse . *Early Church Fathers* (Ipswich, UK: Public Domain Copy), - Additional Texts, 22, <http://www.tertullian.org/fathers/index.htm>. Accessed October 20, 22:15, 20:45.

³⁹⁸ Libanius, 26.

Ammianus (totaling 30,000) were corrupted over time, and the actual size of the Army of Mesopotamia was more likely 18,000 as reported by Zosimus.³⁹⁹ Sozomen and Libanius support Zosimus' numbers and place this army at 20,000 Romans.⁴⁰⁰ Crump's conclusion is persuasive only if the Armenians and *limitane*' armies of the dukes of Phoenicia, Mesopotamia, Syria and Osroene are included. The evidence supports Ammianus' conclusion; that the main army was only slightly larger than the number of soldiers left in Mesopotamia.⁴⁰¹

Ten thousand men garrisoned Ciresium.⁴⁰² Legions I and II Parthia had suffered heavy losses, but still held Nisibis and Castra Maurorum. Assuming the loss of 25% the two legions must have mustered together 4-6,000 men. The Duke of Osroene, Secundinus marched with Julian, assumingly with his best cavalry and infantry, but the Duke of Mesopotamia Cassianus remained at his post. The combined Roman force left in the Mesopotamian region totaled between 30-40,000 men depending on whether the Army of Mesopotamia contained approximately 20,000 as reported by Zosimus, Sozomen or Libanius or 30,000 as reported by Ammianus. Libanius indicates the Armenians were to provide an additional 20,000 men.⁴⁰³ Counting all the troops available, 50-60,000 men, the failure of the Army of Mesopotamia to arrive at Ctesiphon to reinforce Julian was not due to the planned size of the army. Yet the failure of the Army of Mesopotamia to arrive at Ctesiphon created a crisis that in turn, caused Julian to fatally alter his campaign plan.

The assembly area for Shapur's field army during the 363 Campaign remains unidentified, but based upon the timing of Shapur's appearance in the vicinity of

³⁹⁹ Gary A. Crump. *Ammianus Marcellinus as a Military Historian* (Wiesbaden: *Historia* 27 Franz Steiner Verlag GMBH, 1975), 58.

⁴⁰⁰ Libanius, 26.?

⁴⁰¹ "[Shapur] also learned that we left in Mesopotamia an army not much smaller than what he faced." AM, XXV,7.1-6, 529-537.

⁴⁰² The fortress garrison was 6,000 and Julian reinforced it with an additional 4,000 men. See Magnus of Carrhae in Dodgeon and Lieu, 261-263.

⁴⁰³ Libanius, 22-26.

Ctesiphon in June it must have been in the vicinity of the junction of the Tigris and the Greater Zab Rivers. Initial Persian regiments originated from the Iranian highlands, west of the passes in Zagros Mountains. Their assembly areas would have been in Persian Armenia and near Nineveh.⁴⁰⁴ Support for this proposition comes from Magnus of Carrhae, a veteran of the expedition who recorded: “King [Shapur], thinking Julian...was coming via [Nisibis], hastened against him with his whole force. Then he was informed that Julian...was behind him...and a large [Roman] force was coming against him from the front; realizing he was in the middle, he fled to [Persian Armenia].”⁴⁰⁵ Whether he fled through the snowbound mountains into Persian Armenia is debatable. It is clear however, that he declined to cross the Tigris to engage the Army of Mesopotamia and must have considered this army a serious threat. Shapur left the opposition of Julian’s advance to his general, Surena and his small border cavalry army.

Ammianus and Zosimus agree that during the fight down the Euphrates the Persian and Saracen cavalry roughly handled the Roman cavalry. During these skirmishes, four Roman cavalry regiments were disgraced and the Roman baggage train was plundered twice. These skirmishes demonstrated that the Roman cavalry was not as effective as Surena’s Persians and Emir Podosaces’ Saracens. These Savaran knights and Saracen brigands were only border garrison units and desert tribesmen, not the elite Savaran cavalry and the steppe allies of the main Persian Army. Julian lost the cavalry reconnaissance battle but continued to blindly march toward Ctesiphon. His only successful, long-range reconnaissance was Count Victor’s patrol that reconnoitered the roads as far as Ctesiphon.⁴⁰⁶

Julian had the opportunity to take Ctesiphon in late May 363 by assault but failed to properly plan and support Victor’s successful night river crossing of the Tigris. Ammianus, no friend of Victor, placed the blame for the failure squarely on Victor’s

⁴⁰⁴ A.D. Lee. “Campaign Preparation in Late Roman-Persian Warfare.” 257-265. ed. D.H. French and C.S. Lightfoot. *The Eastern Frontier of the Roman Empire, Proceedings of a colloquium held at Ankara in September 1988* (Oxford: BAR International Series 553(i), 1989).

⁴⁰⁵ Dodgeon and Lieu, 262.

⁴⁰⁶ AM, XXIV, 2.4-5, 3.1, 4.8-15, 5.5-10; and Zosimus, III, 15.

shoulders. Zosimus provides key details of the critical battle, ignored by Ammianus as it did not enhance the prestige of Julian. Stripped of its artistic rhetoric, the details of the night assault river crossing and battle are impressive.

Julian unloaded fifteen of the largest boats carrying provisions and war engines, and divided them into three squadrons. He formed a ‘forlorn hope’ of 800 armored men and placed them aboard these boats placing the lead squadron under the command of Count Victor. The Persian east bank was high and topped with a fence enclosing the king’s garden, defended by Persian infantry and cavalry. After nightfall, Julian ordered Victor (over the Roman generals’ objections) to seize the eastern bank occupied by the Persians. Victor’s five boats were quickly lost from sight in the dark, until they were attacked near the eastern bank with fire pots and other incendiaries. Julian seeing Victor’s distress ordered the remaining ten vessels to reinforce Victor’s men. Fighting desperately the Romans gained the east bank. Despite the strong current, some undisciplined Rhineland *auxilia*, afraid they would miss the battle, swam the river by using their shield as paddleboards.⁴⁰⁷

A general engagement started at midnight and continued though the next day. The Persian attempt to drive Victor’s beachhead back into the Tigris failed. As day broke the Persians formed for battle in three lines. The first line consisted of heavily armored Savaran cavalry on leather-barded horses in close order. Infantry supported this line with large shields also in close order. Elephants formed the Persian’s third line. General Pigraxes, (highest ranking Persian present, supported by generals Tigranes, Surena, Anareus and Narses) commanded the Persian army.⁴⁰⁸ At some lull in the desperate fighting Victor was able to organize his units in their traditional battle formation of three battle lines. The unreliable legions and regiments occupied positions in the second line (center line). The light infantry maneuvered between the lines as the situation required. After a preliminary skirmish, battle cries and trumpets signaled the attack and Romans quickly closed with the Persian formation. The quick attack negated the Persian archery

⁴⁰⁷ AM XXIV, 6.4-7, 459-461.

⁴⁰⁸ Ammianus and Zosimus disagreed as to what Persian generals were present. Zosimus, 86; AM XXIV, 6.12, 463.

and the battle developed into a general melee. Julian supported Victor's hard-pressed legions and cohorts with reserves, and to cheer on the laggards while running round the battlefield with a guard of light *auxilia*. After fighting most of the day in extreme heat the Persians wavered, and finally retreated into their city. The Romans pursued the Persians to the gates of Ctesiphon. Taking advantage of the Persian retreat, the Romans attempted to capture a gate and fight their way into the city. Victor was commanding the pursuing troops when he was wounded in the shoulder (by an arrow or bolt probably fired from the walls of the city). Fearing that the few soldiers still with him (who had not stopped to plunder the Persian dead) would follow the routed Persians into the city and be over-whelmed by the mass of enemy, Victor called a halt to the attack. Had Julian reinforced Victor with his light *auxilia* as he should have, the Romans would have taken the gate and subsequently the city. Interestingly Ammianus gives credit for a victory to Julian, not Victor. During the battle, 2,500 Persians were slain to the Roman losses of 70.⁴⁰⁹

There are significant problems with Ammianus' version of the battle.⁴¹⁰ As events unfolded this was the key engagement of the war, as it was the only opportunity for the Romans to capture their objective: Ctesiphon. The Roman army was between 50-60,000 men. The garrison of Ctesiphon, with Surenas' cavalry, could not have numbered more than 20,000 men.⁴¹¹ If the Roman army had been on the east bank of the Tigris, the garrison would not have given battle outside the city wall. Ammianus fails to mention the Roman cavalry, but Zosimus reports that Goths participated in the pursuit of the

⁴⁰⁹ AM, XXIV, 6,14-17, 465.

⁴¹⁰ Historian R.T. Ridley takes the alternate view and find fault with Zosimus' account. R.T. Ridley, "Notes on Julian's Persian Expedition (363)," *Historia: Zeitschrift fur Alte Geschichte*, Vol. 22, No. 2 (2nd Qtr., 1973), 317-330, 322. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4435340>. Accessed October 30, 2010, 23:45.

⁴¹¹ In the sixth century Persian Nisibis provided 10,000 infantry and cavalry to General Firuz's Persian army. If this small city was garrisoned with over 10,000 men, Ctesiphon's garrison could have been considerably larger. See , Carey, 11.

Persians.⁴¹² Only fifteen vessels were unloaded for the river assault, carrying 800 armored infantry (53 infantry per boat). Germanic and Gallic *auxilia* swam the flooded Tigris using their shields as paddleboards, while the rest of the army passed over the Tigris with the wave of Ammianus' quill to fight the Persians in the morning. Zosimus alludes to the fact that Victor fought with a small division of the army and that Julian did not arrive with the main body over the Tigris until the day after the battle, and his guard did not even cross until the second day after the battle.⁴¹³

Ammianus either reported honestly as an eye -witness to the event or glossed over events at Victor's expense to enhance Julian's prestige. In either case he failed to take into account the time it must have taken to pass soldiers and horses over an un-bridged river at night, and the difficulty of performing this maneuver without special horse transports. In 1066, William the Conquer performed this difficult maneuver. As depicted in the Bayeux Tapestry horses were off-loaded from ships or boats by jumping them over the side of the vessel into shallow water. The Romans would have utilized basically the same process; but they did so while actively engaged in combat, ducking fire pots and arrows.

There is no indication that the Romans off-loaded any supplies or equipment other than the 15 vessels used as assault boats/barges and therefore only had a lift capacity of 800 men per trip across the Tigris. Nor did the Roman's attempt to throw a pontoon brigade across the river that night. The only available means to deploy the attacking Romans across the river was to ferry them or have them swim. As the sun rose the next morning, Victor did not have the full army on his beachhead (as Ammianus alleges and Zosimus refutes). During the night Victor's 'forlorn hope' and the aquatic Germanic and Gallic *auxilia* established the beachhead. The remainder of the army was being ferried across. At best Victor commanded between 10-15,000 infantry at sunrise and no cavalry. These numbers are supported by Ammianus as he reported Julian was guarded by light

⁴¹² Zosimus,86.

⁴¹³ Ibid., 86.

auxilia not his mounted armored bodyguard. The difficulty of loading and unloading horses made it impossible for the heavy armored cavalry to begin crossing before first light. At sunup lighter cavalry could have swam the Tigris and the Goths *federates* referred to by Zosimus may have crossed in this manner.⁴¹⁴ Vegetius records that cavalry swimming rivers built small rafts of reeds to carry their arms and armor. These rafts were towed behind man and beast as they swim the river.⁴¹⁵ Neither historian reports that these preparations were conducted by the Roman cavalry or that a pontoon bridge was ready to be thrown across the river once Victor had secured a beachhead.⁴¹⁶ This lack of preparation helps explain the Roman generals' objections to Julian's night river assault.

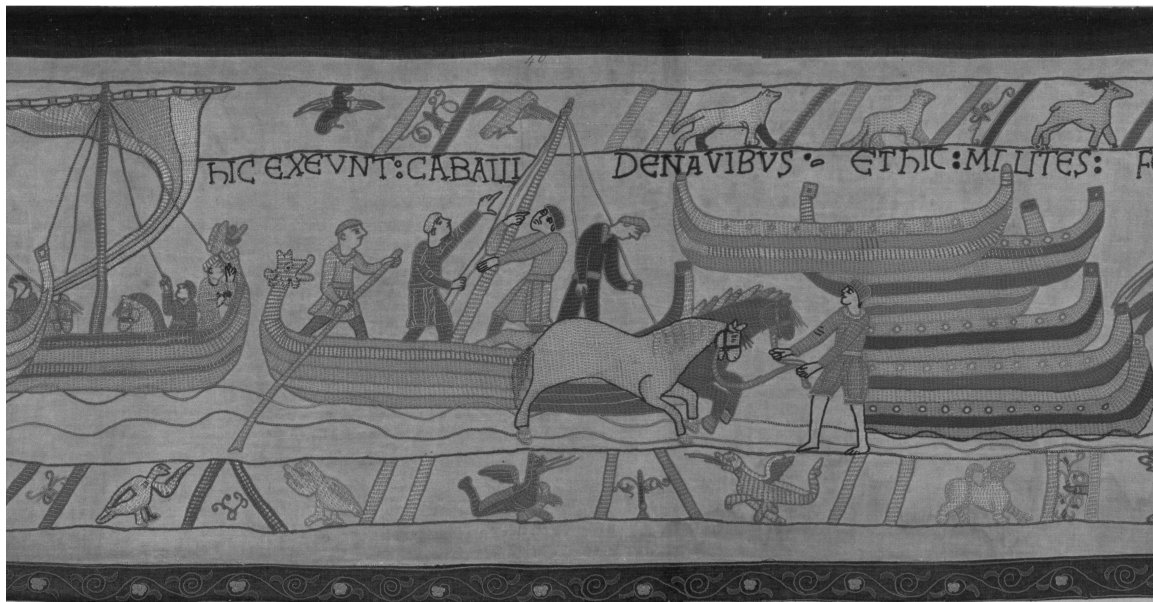


Illustration 3

Bayeux Tapestry. Unloading Horses on the English Coast, 1066.⁴¹⁷

⁴¹⁴ Dixon and Southern (1992), 114.

⁴¹⁵ Vegetius, 39.

⁴¹⁶ Ibid.

⁴¹⁷ Bayeux Tapestry The Crossing Scene 2/ Beach Scene. Copyright Reading Museum (Reading Borough Council). All rights reserved.

Zosimus reports that Julian supported Victor's hard-pressed legions and cohorts from the west bank of the river, with reserves rushing up to the ferry point. Ammianus claims Julian was on the east bank with Victor running to different parts of the battlefield escorted by lightly armed *auxilia*.⁴¹⁸ With Julian's track record of reckless bravery, it is probable that he crossed with the *auxilia*, but apparently did not take command of the beachhead or battle. By modern standards ancient battle formations occupied a small area considering the masses of men involved. Ten thousand men in one battle line of six ranks deep occupied only a frontage of 1,000 meters or .6 miles. A Roman army of 10,000 in three lines would occupy 333 meters or less than .25 miles. When the Persian army broke at noon, the majority of the Roman Army was still on the west bank. If the majority of Victor's troops had not started to loot the 2,500 Persian dead, Victor could have captured the open gate into Ctesiphon. If Julian had been on the east bank commanding the battle, instead of fighting in it like a Homeric hero, he would have been less than 300 meters from Victor and could have reinforced the pursuit with his lightly armed *auxilia*, and captured the city gate. This did not happen. The evidence indicates that Ammianus' eyewitness account was tainted by his bias for Julian and against Victor. An opposed night assault river crossing requires detailed planning and a master's hand to control the operation. The battle of Ctesiphon illustrates that Julian was a gifted amateur tactician who ignored the advice of experienced generals. Youthful enthusiasm and audacity could not overcome stark reality. The principles of Sun Tzu surely applies; a general that is reckless, leads his army to destruction.⁴¹⁹ The final result of the battle was a lost opportunity to take Ctesiphon.

After the battle outside Ctesiphon, there appears to be a large lacuna at the end of Ammianus' Book XXIV, 7.2. Historian N.J.E. Austin argues that there is a missing section that probably mentions King Arsaces' unreliability as the reason Procopius and

⁴¹⁸ Absent in this battle are Julian's heavily armed and armored guard cavalry. AM, XXIV., 6.9-11, 461-463 and Zosimus, 86.

⁴¹⁹ Sunzi, 61.

Sebastianus failed to affect the link-up at Ctesiphon.⁴²⁰ Libanius' *Funeral Oration* supports Austin's argument indicating that the 20,000 Armenian soldiers failed to join the Army of Mesopotamia. Austin's position is also supported by the seventh century Armenian historian Moses Kharenats'i. While Moses misidentified the king of Armenia in 363, he did record that the king of Armenia sent a cavalry contingent to join Julian's campaign. These horsemen, under their General Zawray, probably joined Procopius and Sebastianus marching through Roman Mesopotamia. Moses specifically described Julian's fatal error in judgment. In accordance with Julian's pagan beliefs, he insisted that the Armenians put his picture or statue in their main church. St. Yusik, an Armenian holy man, objected and was flogged to death. Upon hearing of the martyrdom of St. Yusik, General Zawray deserted with the Armenian cavalry and rode home.⁴²¹ Support for this account is found in Ammianus: "There was another evil of no small weight, that the reinforcements which we were expecting to arrive under the command of Arsaces and some of our own generals, did not make their appearance, being detained by the causes already mentioned."⁴²² Ammianus' mention of King Arsaces' 'failure to appear' corroborates Moses and placed the blame for the failure, not on Procopius and Sebastianus, but on Julian. Despite the problems with Moses' account, his version rings true. Historically, statues of pagan emperors were placed in local temples of subjected and allied peoples. If Julian attempted to reintroduce this practice it would explain the Christian Armenians' refusal to join the expedition.

Libanius does not find Procopius and Sebastianus blameless. According to Libanius, the failure of the Army of Mesopotamia to link up was due to the "false play" of the Armenian prince, and the quarrelling of the generals bred cowardice within the Romans. One general was "gaining victories" while the other recommended

⁴²⁰ N.J.E. Austin. "Julian At Ctesiphon: A Fresh Look At Ammianus' Account." *Athenaeum*, Volume 50 (1972), 301-309, 301.

⁴²¹ Moses Kharenats'i as translated and quoted in Dodgeon and Lieu, 326 and 396 fn 67.

⁴²² AM, XXIV, 7.8, 471.

“inaction.”⁴²³ Sebastianus’ character and his later actions support the argument that he was fighting and winning victories while the senior, inexperienced general Procopius recommended “inaction” to please the men.⁴²⁴

A problem facing the Army of Mesopotamia, overlooked by historians was the fact that Rome never recaptured Bezabde. The Persians had uncontested control of the Trans-Tigris region for almost two years. It is questionable whether the region remained loyal to Rome. With Shapur’s main army mustering in the region east of the Tigris, even if the Trans-Tigris princes remained loyal to Rome, it is unlikely they would have dispatched soldiers to join the Romans in Mesopotamia because their lands would have been left undefended. Without the Armenians, the Army of Mesopotamia would have numbered only 20,000 men without stripping the local garrisons of their legions. The Persian garrison of Bezabde and forces from nearby provinces would have been able to hold the fords of the Tigris against the invading Romans even if the river was not in flood.

Having failed to capture Ctesiphon by ‘coup de main’ and considering the failure of the Army of Mesopotamia to arrive, the Roman generals met in late May 363 to review their options. The consensus was that it would be rash and foolish to besiege Ctesiphon as the terrain and weather rendered the city impregnable and it was believed that Shapur would soon appear with a formidable host.⁴²⁵

The character and skill of a general are most tested in the chaos of war rather than planning conferences. Julian faced a situation similar to that of Julius Caesar at the town of Alsea. Julius Caesar was cut off from his supplies and deep in enemy territory; one enemy army was trapped inside the town and a second army was marching to relieve it. Caesar managed to defeat the relieving army and capture the town. Julian’s problem was larger, but similar. The enemy army was expected to materialize at any time. The June temperature was soaring, possibly as high as 120°F, making construction of siege works

⁴²³ Libanius, 26.

⁴²⁴ Ibid., 26.

⁴²⁵ AM, XXIV 7.1-3. 467.

only possible in the early morning and evening hours. The Persians had flooded the lands the Romans had traversed, cutting off their retreat back up the Euphrates, then in full flood. Instead of blockading Ctesiphon and using it as bait to force Shapur to relieve the city and fight a field battle on Roman terms, Julian and his generals took “counsel of their fears”. They decided not to besiege or even blockade Ctesiphon while at the same time rejecting Shapur’s peace overtures. Up to this point Julian held the initiative, forcing Shapur to react to Roman actions. With this decision, Julian handed the initiative to Shapur.

After rejecting the peace overture, on or about June 5, 363, the Roman command held a second counsel of war to decide whether to march inland and seek a decisive battle with Shapur or retreat north along the Tigris back to Roman Mesopotamia. Ammianus, Libanius, and Zosimus all record that Julian burned his boats, but only Libanius explains that the boats had to be burned regardless of whether Julian retreated or marched inland.⁴²⁶

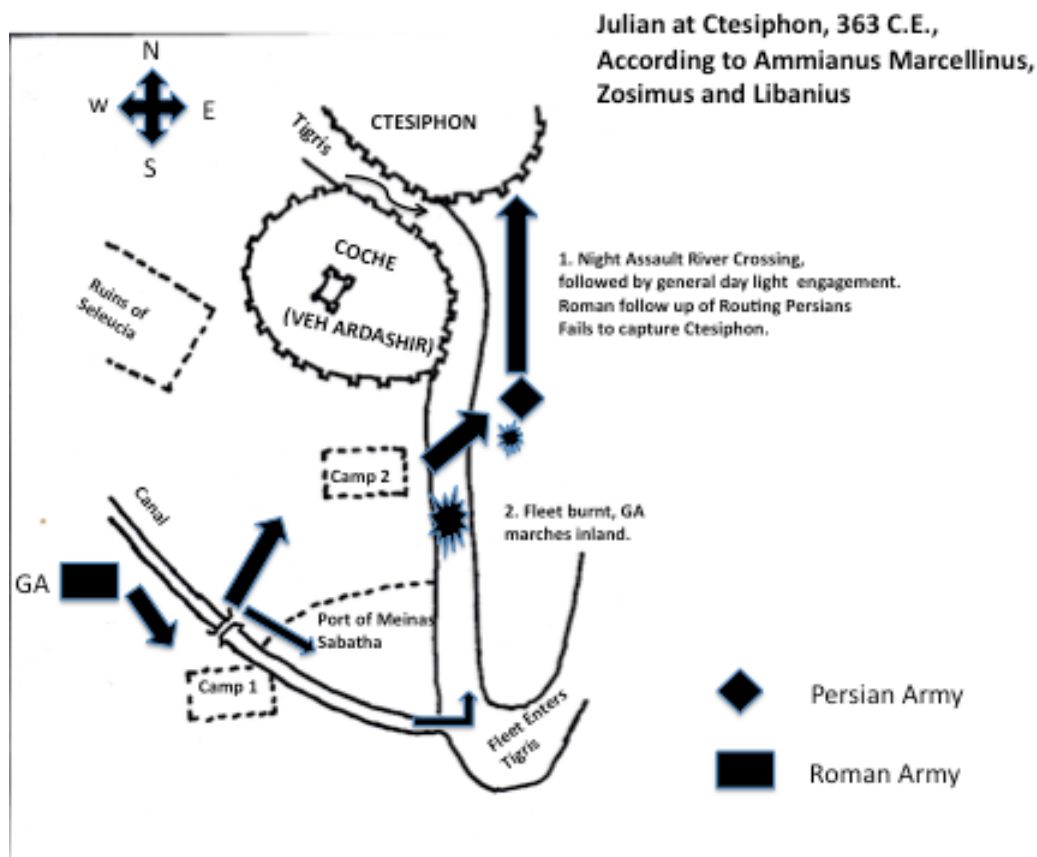
“This state of things [the Army of Mesopotamia failing to arrive], however, did not discourage the emperor; he did not approve of their being absent, yet he proceeded as he had planned to do if they had joined him, and extended his views as far as Hyrcania and the rivers of India... The flotilla, according to his original design, had been given for prey to the flames... because the Tigris, swift and strong, running counter to the prows of the boats, forced them to require a vast number of hands (to tow them up the stream); and it was necessary for those engaged in towing to be more than half the army... the burning of the fleet removed every encouragement to laziness, for whoever wished to do nothing, by feigning sickness, obtained conveyance in a boat... but when there were no vessels, every man was under arms.”⁴²⁷

As drastic as Julian’s decision to burn his supply ships was, it was an accepted tactic recommended by Sun Tzu. Soldiers deep in enemy territory, in desperate straits lose the sense of fear: “If there is no place of refuge they will stand firm. If they are in hostile country, they will show a stubborn front. If there

⁴²⁶ Ibid., XXIV 7.1-7, 467-471; and Zosimus, III, 26.

⁴²⁷ Libanius, 26-27; Mathews, 158.

is no help...they will fight hard.”⁴²⁸Theodoret (c. 393-466) the Greek ecclesiastical politician and historian, in his *Ecclesiastical History*, recorded that Julian “burnt his boats so making his men fight not in willing, but in forced obedience.”⁴²⁹ It was a dramatic gesture worthy of a new Alexander the Great. But, as only Libanius and Ammianus note pulling the boats up the Tigris in flood, if possible, would have taken 20,000 men. Libanius also notes that the fleet entered the Tigris south of Ctesiphon and Coche.⁴³⁰ To move the fleet up river Julian had to take one or both cities, which Julian and his generals decided were impregnable (See Map 2).



⁴²⁸ Sunzi, 24 and 39.

⁴²⁹ Theodoret, translated and quoted in Dodgeon and Lieu, 271.

⁴³⁰ Libanius, 25; and Dodgeon and Lieu, 233.

Illustration 4⁴³¹

Libanius also reports that one reason the Romans did not besiege Ctesiphon was that the Romans were short of rations before the decision to march away from the river.⁴³² The Roman Army was very low on supplies when the boats were burnt, and they were probably nearly empty. The *Praesental* Army had taken approximately 90 days to arrive and set up camp before the walls of Ctesiphon. The combat troops and cavalry horses alone consumed 9,495 tons of grain. To veer from the Tigris River and march up the *Diyala* Valley, the Romans would have had to carry 3,150 tons of grain or pillage 105 tons of grain and 35 tons of fodder per day. With the exception of loading 12 to 18 boats on wagons for bridging, Julian's supply trains were not reinforced or reorganized. Julian's plan was, apparently to live off the land and consume the harvest then being collected from the fields. On or about June 15, 363, the army was issued 20 days rations, most likely in biscuit form. These iron rations would feed the soldiers until July 10th. On June 16, 363, the Romans struck camp and started to march north toward the Diyala River and the region of Corduena. After crossing the Diyala, Julian turned east toward Barsaphtas and arrived on June 17, 363, just in time to meet Shapur's vanguard.

The battles and skirmishes of late June and early July, 363 demonstrate Shapur's mastery of war. Shapur fought his army with the skill of a chess master, forcing the Romans to react to his moves. He used the land as a natural ally and his knowledge of the terrain and distances to great advantage.⁴³³ He applied lessons learned fighting steppe nomads in the 350s, employing both the direct and indirect methods of attack. He placed particular effort in defeating the Roman reconnaissance effort and security screen. Shapur's tactics were selected to delay the Romans so their deteriorating supply situation would weaken their fighting ability.

⁴³¹ Map modified from the map found in Dodgeon and Lieu, 232.

⁴³² Libanius, 27.

⁴³³ Sunzi, 75.

Even before the Romans departed Ctesiphon on June 16, 363, the Persians began burning the crops and grass along Julian's anticipated route of advance.⁴³⁴ On June 17, the Romans engaged Shapur's vanguard in a general engagement that turned out to be a draw or at best a 'pyrrhic victory' for the Romans. Eight days of intensive skirmishing followed. The majority of the skirmishes pitted Persian cavalry and elephants, supported by Saracens against the van and rear guard of the Roman army, which often marched in square formation. The square formation stretched over four miles from advance to rearguard. Julian daily rushed, with his armored cavalry and bodyguard, from crises to crises, exhausting men and horse in the extreme heat. When the rear guard of the square was attacked, the front and sides continued marching forward. A gap formed providing an opening for the enemy to cut off the rear guard and attack the baggage train in the center of the square. Julian and his heavy armored cavalry had to rush back and forth along the line of march stabilizing the situation. Shapur refused a general engagement, burned the crops and vegetation, and kept up incessant attacks upon the Romans, slowing their rate of advance. During these skirmishes, four more cavalry regiments were disgraced.⁴³⁵ Unable to dominate the cavalry skirmishes, the Romans had difficulty collecting the forage required for their animals. Shapur's indirect hit and run tactics, most likely based upon his experience fighting nomads in the 350s, maximized his army's strength and negated the Roman Army's strength.⁴³⁶

On or about June 22, 363 Persian General Merena, supported by two of Shapur's sons fought a general engagement. Heavy casualties resulted with the Persians losing 50 satraps and grandees. The casualties were so heavy that a three-day truce followed where the Romans did not advance.⁴³⁷ Another tactical 'pyrrhic victory' for the Romans,

⁴³⁴ AM XXIV,7.3-8, 469-471; Zosimus, 83-84.

⁴³⁵ AM, XXV, 1, 1-2, 7-9. The authorized strength of Roman cavalry regiments is generally accepted as being 500 men. The disgraced eight cavalry regiments' combined strength was 2,400 men. See generally Terence Coello. *Unit Sizes In The Late Roman Army* (Oxford: BAR International Series 645, 1996).

⁴³⁶ Sunzi, 81.

⁴³⁷ AM, XXV,1.14-19, 483-485.

but the three-day truce was a major operational victory for the Persians, for the Romans were pinned in place consuming their limited supplies.

Due to the Persian scorched earth policy, only a few days after marching away from the Tigris and crossing the Diyala River, the Romans began to suffer from lack of supplies for man and beast. The draft oxen in particular suffered from lack of forage.⁴³⁸ The boats were lost as ox teams fell behind. At the time, this loss may have seemed inconsequential but it doomed the Romans. Oddly, Ammianus, an experienced staff officer, never discerns the significance of this loss.

Traitorous local guides and advisors were traditionally blamed for Roman defeats against Parthia and Persia. Julian joins Crassus' as an experienced general who, allegedly, was led to defeat by these dastardly characters.⁴³⁹ However, Crassus' and Julian's defeats cannot be blamed on misinformation of this type.⁴⁴⁰ Crassus was allegedly misled in his 53 BCE campaign (by spies and guides) as he attempted to bring the Parthian Army to battle. Crassus was guided from the Roman controlled Euphrates River, to the Roman garrisoned cities of Carrhae, Ichnae and Niceporium, located along the Belikh River. The scouts were tracking what they believed to be the Parthian main army.⁴⁴¹ Plutarch argued that Abgar of Osrhoene, had lead Crassus through difficult terrain as an act of treachery. Sheldon correctly responds that the allegation is unsupported by the facts.⁴⁴² Plutarch failed to realize that since the campaign occurred in late Spring, the rivers and intermittent streams would have been swollen from the mountain snowmelt.⁴⁴³ The mean high temperature for the Carrhae area (modern Harran)

⁴³⁸ Ibid., XXV, 1, 18-19, 2-3.

⁴³⁹ Ibid., XXIV., 7.1-8, 467-471; Mathews, 158.

⁴⁴⁰ Ridley agrees with this argument and points out that exiled Homisdas and his Persian were in the Roman army and would have known the area. See Ridley 322.

⁴⁴¹ Plutarch, *The Parallel Lives*, Bernadotte Perrin, trns., Bill Thayer Webpage ed. (Loeb Classic Library, 1919). Online Edition, 22.1-3, <http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Plutarch/Lives/home.html>. Accessed October 20, 2010, 20:45.

⁴⁴² Sheldon (2010), 35.

⁴⁴³ Simpson, 110.

in May and June is between 83-93° F.⁴⁴⁴ Abgar guided the Romans along a known caravan track in pursuit of either a Parthian scouting force or their main army. The terrain was not difficult for acclimatized legionaries and Crassus was not ambushed on the west side of the Belikh River in Roman Mesopotamia. A meeting engagement between the Romans and the Parthians occurred east of the river in Parthian Mesopotamia. There was no ambush and the Roman army was not led astray. Crassus was exactly where he wanted to be: fighting the Parthians near a water supply.

The Persian guides could not have misled Julian either. Without taking Ctesiphon, the fleet had to be burned or it would have fallen into Persian hands when the Romans marched inland. The road to the Persian heartland (i.e. the Silk Road) followed the Diyala River. This road was no mere goat track, but the route trade caravans and armies had tramped for hundreds if not thousands of years. The Roman Army leaving Ctesiphon could not have missed the road, with or without guides. Some misguided Roman historians blame defeats on traitorous guides (and competent generals suddenly becoming gullible) rather than performing a factual analysis of events. Ammianus employs references to traitorous guides and ill omens as a literary tool to explain why the expedition was doomed to fail, rather than blame the emperor's lack of military skill.⁴⁴⁵

⁴⁴⁴ Turkish Tourist Bureau. <http://www.iwasinturkey.com>.

⁴⁴⁵ Mathews, 158, 176-179.

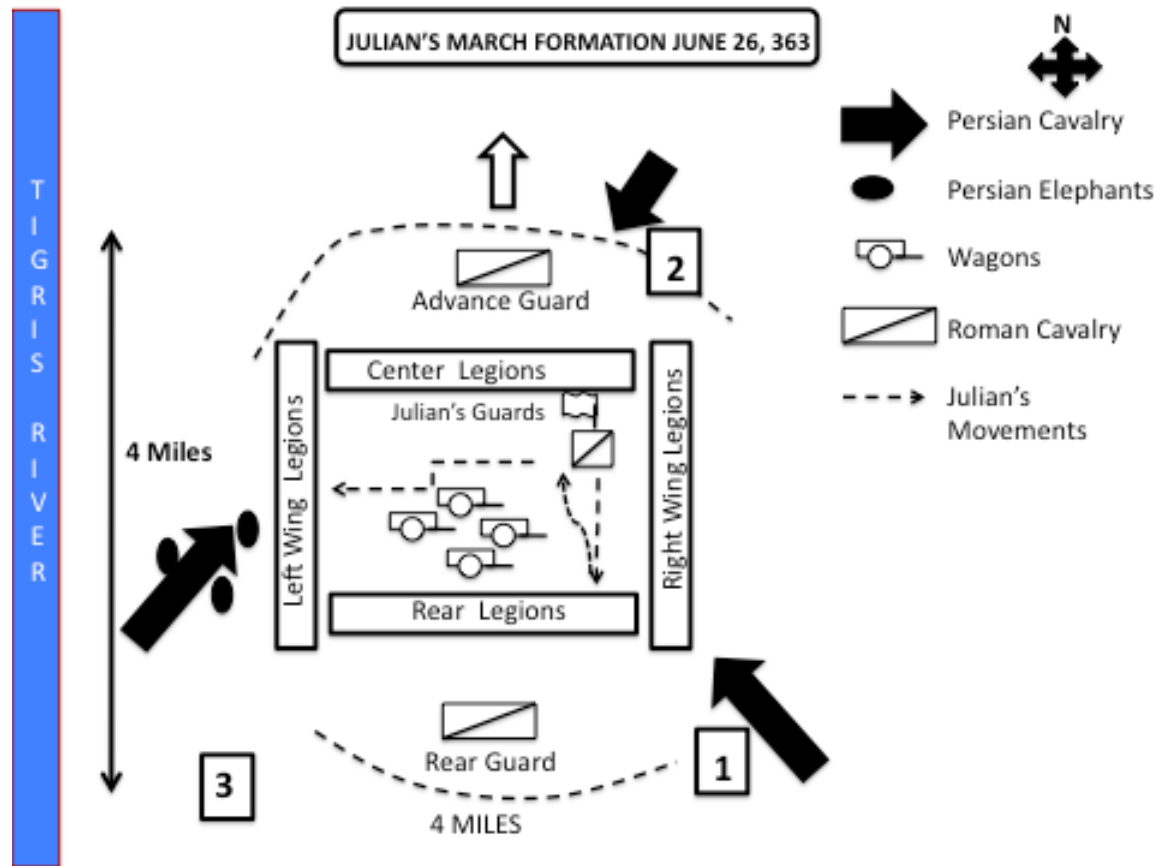


Illustration 5.⁴⁴⁶

After the truce, on June 26, 363, the Romans resumed their marching in square north along the Tigris east bank when their rear was attacked.⁴⁴⁷ Julian riding in the advance guard without his armor, rushed to the rear with his bodyguard. While in route he discovered the advance guard had been attacked, followed closely by a Persian elephant and cavalry attack against his left wing. The Persians had planned a three-pronged ambush against the square and the Roman security forces around the square failed to detect thousands of Persians supported by elephants before the trap was sprung. The fighting was so heavy that Persian generals Merena and Nohodares were killed. Rushing from crisis to crisis without his armor, Julian was also killed.⁴⁴⁸ His army was

⁴⁴⁶ Illustration based upon AM, XXV, 3.1-15, 491-497.

⁴⁴⁷ Dodgeon and Lieu, 236.

⁴⁴⁸ AM, XXV, 3.5-13, 493-497.

left leaderless, out of supplies, and pinned against the flooded Tigris. Representatives of the western and eastern divisions of the army could not agree on a successor, and as a result Jovian, a nonentity, was selected emperor.⁴⁴⁹ On the morning of June 27 or 28, 363 Persian cavalry and elephants attacked the Romans as they marched out of their camp near the castle of Suma. The Battle of the Elephants was a significant event as recorded by Ammianus and could have lead to the defeat and total destruction of the army. The fact that Ammianus provided details of the elephant attack indicates that he may have been present with the Joviani and Herculiani Legions during the fight.

The standard bearer of the Legion Joviani was an enemy of the new Emperor Jovian. With Jovian's elevation to emperor, this soldier deserted to the Persians and reported the situation in the Roman camp to Shapur. Upon hearing this information, Shapur added his Royal Cavalry Corps to the next attack upon the Roman rear guard. On the morning of June 27 or 28, 363, after sacrifices, the Roman army marched out of the camp to continue its march up the Tigris. Rather than waiting for the Romans to deploy the Persian commander attacked as the square was being formed. The Roman left wing included the traitor's legion Joviani and its sister legion Herculiani. The attacking elephants threw the Roman's left wing cavalry and infantry into disorder, but the steadfastness of the legions Joviani and Herculiani prevented disaster. These two legions were pushed back to a rise (possibly the camp wall) where Roman logistics wagons were located. Availing themselves of the high ground and wagons, the legionaries threw darts from above wounding the elephants and fought the Savaran armored cavalry to a standstill. The legions Jovii and Victores reinforced the legionaries holding the elephants at bay and together routed the elephants into the Persian cavalry. In the desperate fighting a number of elephants were killed along with the Roman tribunes Julianus, Maximianus, and Macrobius.⁴⁵⁰

⁴⁴⁹ R.C. Blockley, *East Roman Foreign Policy, Formation and Conduct from Diocletian to Anastasius* (Leeds: Francis Cairns, 1992), 26-27.

⁴⁵⁰ Zosimus, 89; AM, XXV, 6.1-4, 521-523.

That night the Romans stopped in a wooded area and built a traditional camp. After dark, the Persian cavalry broke through the praetorian gate and almost fought their way to the emperor's tent.⁴⁵¹ On July 1, 363, the heavy Roman cavalry, with their horses exhausted and riders walking, fell behind the army and were surrounded by Saracens. The Saracens were driven off by Roman light cavalry.⁴⁵² On the night of July 1, 363 the Romans camped near the town of Dara. Constant Persian attacks pinned the Romans at Dara for four days.⁴⁵³ Persian successes at the Battle of the Elephants, the night raid on the camp and the surrounding of the Roman heavy cavalry demonstrate that, not only had the Romans lost the initiative to the Persians, they had lost the security and reconnaissance fight as well.

As a result of these setbacks, the Roman's decided to escape across to the Tigris' west bank. On or about the night of July 5, 363 five hundred Germanic and Gallic auxiliaries swam the flooded Tigris, killed the Persian guards and established a beachhead on the west bank. Due to the earlier loss of the boats, Roman engineers attempted and failed to build a bridge of inflated animal skins. While Ammianus notes that the army was starving, the soldiers should have had about five days rations remaining. Sun Tzu states that a soldier fights because he has no choice but to fight or die. A soldier quits fighting because he can quit and live instead of fighting and die.⁴⁵⁴ Clearly Shapur understood this principle because he offered terms to end the war that would save the Roman Army while achieving his war objectives. To save the Army, Jovian, had no choice but to agree to Shapur's peace terms. These terms were surprisingly lenient under the circumstances.

Blockley summarizes the new treaty into four main points. First, the Persians acquired the Roman Trans-Tigris regions of Arzanene, Moxoene, Zabdicene, and

⁴⁵¹ AM, XXV, 6.10-13, 527.

⁴⁵² Ibid., XXV, 6.5-13, 525-527

⁴⁵³ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁴ Sunzi, 86, Robert L. Cantrell, *Understanding Sun Tzu* (Arlington: Center For Advantage, 2003), 15.

Cordune together with fifteen forts on both sides of the Tigris. Second the Persians acquired Nisibis, Singara, and Castra Maurorum. Third, the Romans were permitted to withdraw the Roman garrisons from the region and civilian populations of Nisibis and Singara. While Ammianus claims that Shapur insisted, as he had done in the letter to Constantius, that he wanted all the lands ceded in the Treaty of 298, the list of principalities acquired in 363 does not match those lost in 298. Ingilene and Sophene remained under Roman control. This division recognized the strategic and cultural orientation of the region and created a stable and defensible settlement for both sides.⁴⁵⁵ Shapur had proved that not only was he a superior military strategist and operational artist, but also a superior diplomat. As Tom Holland observed, after Julian's defeat and death in 363, Roman leadership was forced to accept that Persia could not be defeated by short-term application of the combined resources of the untied empire. It was simpler to purchase coexistence. These subsidies over the next 150 years funded the Persian fortifications on their northern frontier.⁴⁵⁶

⁴⁵⁵ Bockley (1992), 27.

⁴⁵⁶ Tom Holland, *In The Shadow of the Sword, The Battle for Global Empire And The Ancient World* (London: Little Brown Book Group, 2012, 95.

Conclusion.

In the wars with Parthia and Persia prior to the Nisibis War, Rome viewed its opponent as inferior both culturally and militarily. This was essentially the opinion of the European Roman elite. Eastern Romans were lulled into complacency by years of peace imposed by the Treaty of 298, while the Persians seethed with indignation. Considering that the Roman Empire was forged and maintained by war, the Roman elite of the Late Roman Empire was surprisingly ignorant of the operational art of war and strategy. Few emperors explained their decision-making process in developing policy.

An analysis of the reign King Shapur II indicates that he was one of the great captains of Late Antiquity and a great statesman of his era. As a young monarch he focused the military might of Persia on defeating the Saracen tribes raiding the Tigris-Euphrates Valley and absorbing the Arab coastal kingdoms. As a result Persia gained control of the two major trade routes between Rome and the Orient. With the Arab challenge resolved, Shapur focused on Rome and the humiliating Treaty of 298. The Nisibis War began in 337 when Shapur was about 27 years old. Over the twenty-five years of war Shapur developed from a general who utilized conventional, simple direct attacks (ignoring terrain and weather) into to a skilled master of the indirect approach to victory. He employed diplomacy as effectively as the sword to separate the Tran-Tigris regions and Albania from the Roman sphere of influence. His campaigns of 359-361 are textbook examples of the advantages to be gained by utilizing all the tools of the kingdom (military, diplomacy and economic). During the 363 campaign Shapur knew his enemy's capabilities and weakness and understood his countrymen and their capability. He considered time, distance, weather, and terrain and factored these elements into his campaign to defeat Julian. He capitalized on Roman mistakes that alienated the Armenians and some of the Saracen tribes as well. Yet, Shapur's greatest achievement was that of peacemaker. The Treaty of 363 recognized the strategic and cultural orientation of the region and created a stable and defensible settlement for both sides that lasted almost two centuries.⁴⁵⁷

⁴⁵⁷ Bockley (1992), 27.

The Emperor Constantius initially assumed the strategic defense because he only controlled one-third of Rome's resources. The educated pagan and Christian elite no longer served in the Roman military. It is therefore not surprising that Constantius' military policy, with regards to the defense of the empire, was held in contempt and misunderstood by the elite. The elite, educated on Caesar's War Commentaries, Polybius and Levy's account of the Punic Wars, expected the empire to be expanded or defended by direct legionary attrition warfare. They failed to understand the shift of eastern frontier defensive policy by Constantius because of limited resources. The Roman national defense strategy established during the Nisibis War developed into an indirect Byzantine policy of strategic defense and subsidies to "pay off" opponents.

Rome's strategic defense during the Nisibis War had a significant influence on the development of the Eastern Roman Army when compared to the Western Roman Army. Policing the *limes* in the East required cavalry because of the extended distances and mounted opponents. As a result there was a higher ratio of cavalry to infantry units in the ducats of the East. Without the ability to recruit Germanic *auxilia* units, the *limitanei* armies relied on locally recruited legions and units including organic archers and light infantry. While considered second-class by the Roman pay system, these eastern infantry units were specialized in the use of artillery and defending fortresses and cities. They were also fully capable of fighting Persians in open battle. The poor performance of both eastern and western cavalry against the Persians during the Nisibis War led to a gradual improvement of eastern Roman cavalry by the subsequent recruitment of Goths, Huns, Saracens, as well as other smaller horse tribes. This innovation resulted in the development of a new Roman cavalry tradition within the population of the Eastern Empire. During the next series of Roman-Persian wars in the sixth century, cavalry became the decisive arm of the Roman Army despite the fact that the ratio of cavalry to infantry did not increase from the fourth century. The *limitanei* legions and cavalry of the sixth century were fully capable of marching out and defeating raiders and were important to Justinian I's offensive to reclaim Africa.

Constantius' critics failed to comprehend the resources required to decisively defeat Persia and underestimated the abilities of Shapur. Julian's 363 offensive was similar to Constantine's in 337, including the ultimate goal of replacing Shapur with a

client prince. Julian massed between 85-95,000 men for the invasion, supported by three *limitanei* armies (totaling between 18-27,000 men) to hold his fortified cities. Militarily he had sufficient combat power to accomplish his objectives. However his logistical, intelligence and diplomatic efforts failed to meet his requirements. Diplomatically, Julian failed to gain and maintain the support of Armenia and a number of the Saracen tribes. The failure in Armenia (due to Julian's religious policies and/or Shapur's diplomatic efforts) denied the Army of Mesopotamia 20,000 Armenian soldiers and resulted in their failure to fight their way to Ctesiphon. The inability to bind all of the Saracen tribes to the Roman cause reinforced Surena's Persian frontier covering force with desert raiders. These diplomatic failures unhinged Julian's campaign plan and he was not skilled enough to adapt to the new situation.

Julian's intelligence operations failed to provide him with critical information. "Foreknowledge" can only be obtained from people with accurate intelligence of the situation.⁴⁵⁸ The dukes of the East could not provide Julian with the location of the main Persian army; whether it wintered in the Tigris-Euphrates Valley; or disbanded and returned home to the Zagros Mountains. Julian also lacked basic information regarding the fortifications and size of Ctesiphon.⁴⁵⁹ At the tactical level, the Persian and Saracen cavalry out-classed Julian's light cavalry. The problems commenced as the Roman Army marched into Persia and steadily worsened as they advanced. Roman scouts failed to provide intelligence needed to defeat the Persian covering force. As the Romans advanced the situation became so critical that Roman scouts could not even report the presence of elephants in ambush until they attacked. Roman light cavalry could not protect fields from Persian fires. These intelligence failures left Julian's army blind, incapable only of reacting to Shapur's attacks.

Julian's logistical system was insufficient to supply his army in the heart of enemy territory. He had the resources of the entire empire at his disposal, but could not deploy supplies forward in sufficient quantity. Instead of spending his first year establishing a forward supply base one-hundred miles south of Cicesium on the

⁴⁵⁸ Sunzi, 96.

⁴⁵⁹ Lee (1993), 81-90, 112-115, 147-158, 170-184; and Austin and Rankov, 227-234.

Euphrates and retaking Bezabde, he attempted to feed his army on the Persian harvest. As the Persian cavalry burned the fields and grasslands his army starved. Julian had the resources to succeed had he taken the time to develop the logistical infrastructure for the theater of operation. Rather, he rashly attempted to achieve all his objectives in one campaign season and failed to develop his diplomatic, intelligence and logistical foundations.

The long-term impact of Julian's defeat and the Nisibis War was one hundred and fifty years of relative peace. Due to Shapur's diplomatic skills in dictating the peace terms, the Treaty of 363 wisely recognized the strategic and cultural orientation of the region and created a stable and defensible settlement for both sides.⁴⁶⁰ Rome was forced to acknowledge that Persia was a peer. Rome and Persia fenced diplomatically and militarily over Armenia until it was partitioned by the two powers in the 380s.⁴⁶¹ Julian's campaign during the Nisibis War was Rome's last opportunity to decisively defeat Persia as it afterward lacked the necessary resources. Rome's strategic defense evolved to a policy of limited defensive wars augmented by subsidies until the seventh century.

⁴⁶⁰ Bockley (1992), 27.

⁴⁶¹ Beate Dignas and Engelbert Winter, *Rome and Persia in Late Antiquity, Neighbors and Rivals* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) 185-186.

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