MANPOWER RESOURCES AND ARMY ORGANISATION IN THE ARSAKID EMPIRE

Abstract: As the territory of the Arsakid state (248 BC – AD 226) increased in size, the Parthians were able to expand their demographic and economic base. This led to an increase in the size and military might of the armed forces. The military strength and effectiveness of the army were key factors in determining the Parthians' political relations with their neighbours, especially the Seleukid empire, Rome, the Caucasus lands, the nomadic peoples of the Caspian – North Caucasus region, and the peoples of Central Asia. From the 1st century BC onward the Arsakids had a military potential of almost 300,000 soldiers. This mobilisation strength mirrors the size of the Arsakid armed forces in a defensive stance, including the royal forces, Parthian national army, garrisons, and mercenaries. As a number of units were not suitable for offensive operations, one may assume that the power of an offensive army might not have exceeded half of the total figure, i.e. about 140,000-150,000. This is slightly more than the figure of 120,000 soldiers which appears as the total for the largest of Arsakid armies.

Introduction

A comprehensive examination of Arsakid strategy must take the human military potential of the Parthian empire into consideration. As the territory of the Arsakid state (248 BC – AD 226) increased in size, the Parthians were able to expand their demographic and economic base. This led to an increase in the size and military might of the armed forces. The military strength and effectiveness of the army were key factors in determining the Parthians' political relations with their neighbours, especially the Seleukid empire, Rome, the Caucasus lands, the nomadic peoples of the Caspian – North Caucasus region, and the peoples of Central Asia.[1] Ironically, the size of the Parthian armies has never been fully investigated, even though it is well known that the success of their conquests was due as much to their high level of tactical and strategic skill as it was to their significant numbers. In addition to the particulars that a

[1] See Widengren (1976); Wolski (1976); Olbrycht (1998), (1998a); Brizzi (2012) 229-247.

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given situation demanded, Parthian numerical strength was largely dependent on a variety of social, political, and economic factors.[2]

The aim of this study is to estimate the numerical strength of the Arsakid armed forces. Over the centuries, nothing could have contributed more to the effectiveness of the Arsakid military than the numbers and quality of its personnel. Indeed, in order to be effective, the Arsakid armed forces must have had adequate numbers of combat-ready military personnel with the right experience, training and skills. One of the objectives of strategy is to assemble the right kind of highly trained men in order to employ them offensively or defensively alongside financial, technical and information resources.[3] The Arsakids were able to build and effectively manage their manpower resources as a crucial factor in their grand strategy.

Data on the numerical strength of Parthian military forces are erratic and call for cautious consideration. Specific figures are provided in the accounts of only a few Parthian campaigns that occurred in the reigns of Phraates II (132-127 BC), Orodes II (57-37 BC) and Phraates IV (37-3 BC). Some less specific but nevertheless useful evidence is likewise available for the period between Artabanos II (AD 8/9-39) and Vologases I (AD 50-79). In order to flush out additional details regarding the military organization of the Parthian Empire, it will be instructive to make use of comparisons with Achaemenid and Sasanian military affairs as well as to the military history of Armenia.

The numerical strength of Arsakid armies

According to Justin (41.2.6), the entire Parthian army that appeared on the battlefield under Phraates IV against Mark Antony in 36 BC consisted of 50,000 horsemen, including 400 of the so-called *liberi* — the elite aristocratic cavalry. In his account of the same campaign, Plutarch (*Ant*. 44.2) speaks of a 40,000-strong Parthian cavalry attacking and effectively annihilating Statianus' Roman corps, which had been detached from Mark Antony's main forces in Media Atropatene. Another

[2] For the significance of the manpower factor in strategy, consult Corvisier & Childs (1994) 613-619 (entry 'Numerical Strength').

[3] This strategic aspect deals with the principles of quantitative sufficiency, qualitative superiority, resource sufficiency and mass (concentrating combat power at the decisive place and time). Thus Collins (2002) 100-103.

army totalling at least 40,000 infantry defended Phraaspa and other strongholds in Media Atropatene against the invading Roman troops (see below). Vologases I offered 40,000 mounted archers (*hippotoxotai*) to the Roman Emperor Vespasian around AD 69.[4] Surenas' army at Carrhae (53 BC) numbered at least 10,000 cavalry including 1,000 cataphracts (Plut. *Crass*. 21.6). More than likely there were a few thousand more cavalry, since Plutarch did not include the forces of Sillakes, governor of Mesopotamia.[5] Meanwhile the main Parthian force, undoubtedly numbering tens of thousands, was deployed in Armenia under the command of King Orodes II. There is also information on Pakoros' army at Gindaros in Syria in 38 BC: the defeated Parthian force numbered more than 20,000 soldiers (Florus 2.19.6).

Phraates I (132-127 BC) was able to muster an army of 120,000 soldiers against the forces of Antiochos VII Sidetes in 129/128 BC.[6] Elsewhere we are informed that around 110-100 BC Mithradates II sent a 20,000-strong corps of cavalry to escort a group of Chinese ambassadors from the eastern border of Parthia to the royal seat.[7] In AD 136, an army of 20,000 infantry was mustered in Adiabene by Vologases II, king of Parthia, against some "rebels" in the western fringes of Media Atropatene.[8] According to the Syriac *Chronicle of Arbela*, Vologases IV (AD 192/3-207/8) furnished 120,000 soldiers for his campaign against the rebellious Persians and Medes.[9] This figure seems inflated as the total for a field army, but it may mirror the actual number of men in the Arsakid royal army under Vologases IV, including the forces from Parthia proper, Media Atropatene and most of Greater Media (see below).

The ancient Armenian historian Moses Khorenatsi (Movsēs Xorenac'i) often uses the figure of 10,000 for divisions of armed forces or corps in Hellenistic and Arsakid Armenia (see MX 2.7; 2.8; 1.14). Although this testimony is greatly embellished with legendary motifs, it contains a

[4] Tac. *Hist*. 4.51.1; Suet. *Div*. *Vesp*. 6.4.

[5] For Sillakes' position, see Dio 40.12.2. It was Sillakes who brought the head of Crassus to King Orodes of Parthia in Armenia (Plut. *Crass*. 33.3). Cf. Karras-Klapproth (1988) 159-161. On the battle of Carrhae, see Nikonorov (1995); Traina (2010), (2010a).

[6] Porphyrios *FGrHist* 260 F32 (19) [BNJ 260 F32].

[7] *Shiji* 123: "When the Han envoys first visited the kingdom of An-hsi, the king of An-hsi dispatched a party of twenty thousand horsemen to meet them on the eastern border of his kingdom. The capital of the kingdom is several thousand li from the eastern border, and as the envoys proceeded there they passed through twenty or thirty cities inhabited by great numbers of people" (Watson (1993) 243). See Olbrycht (1998) 102.

[8] Kawerau (1985) 26-28; Olbrycht (1998) 205-206.

[9] Kawerau (1985) 41-42.

variety of historical kernels including the account of the system of mustering Armenian armies in imitation of the Parthians, as well the social structure and military organisation of Arsakid Armenia.[10] The Parthian king Valarshak (identifiable as Vologases I, AD 51-79) plays a special role in the history of Armenia and Caucasian Albania. Valarshak is said to have installed two princes as governors on the marches of eastern Armenia, "with ten thousand [troops]" (MX 2.8). Moses Khorenatsi (MX 2.8) claims that in Albania "the Parthian Valarshak made Aran governor with ten thousands[troops]."[11] This was apparently the contingent needed to keep the country under Arsakid control.

These examples show that Parthian military forces were organised on the decimal system. Their typical fighting unit was a battalion of 1,000 men, under colours in the form of a dragon (Parthian *drafš*).[12] Ten battalions made up a division or corps totalling 10,000 soldiers. As a rule, one or more such divisions/corps composed an army. There were minor units of 50, 100 and 500 soldiers.[13] The terminology related to the specific military units and subunits is disputable. A small company was probably a *wašt*; a large unit a *drafš*; and a division/corps a *gund*.[14] The term *gund* was widely used in Armenian sources to denote military units of different size, including an army, a corps, a battalion/regiment, as well as smaller units.[15]

By and large, a decimal grade was observed in the organization of the army in Parthia. The same applies to Armenia in the Arsakid and Sasanian periods. Achaemenid military units were organized decimally, too[16].

[10] On Parthian-Armenian relations in the Arsakid period, see Garsoïan (1976), (1997). On the disputed historical value of Armenian sources, consult Traina (2010b) 402-404, who rightly treats them as useful for some aspects of Armenian and Parthian-Sasanian history. A critical stance towards Armenian testimonies is taken by Kettenhofen (1998) 325-353.

[11] See Mamedova (1986) 171.

[12] Lukian. *Quom. hist*. 29. See Shahbazi 1994, 312-315; Nikonorov 2005, 156.

[13] Widengren (1976) 281-282. Strabo 15.3.18 speaks of units of fifty commanded by sons of the king or of a satrap as basic detachments of young Persians undergoing military training (up to the age of 24).

[14] Widengren (1976) 281-282; Shahbazi (1987). According to Widengren (1976) 281-282, the *drafš* numbered 100 soldiers while the *wašt* consisted of 50 men. He assumes that the *gund* was a unit of 1,000 men commanded by a *hazārpat*. Shahbazi (1987) claims that the *drafš* was a unit of 1,000 men.

[15] See, e.g., Sebeos, *Hist.* 8 with Thomson (1989) 4 n. 20. For more details, cf. Ayvazyan (2015) 50-58.

[16] On the decimal system of military organisation in Achaemenid Iran, see Hdt. 7.81; Xen. *Kyr*. 2.1.23. Cf. Shahbazi (1987) 492.

However, the tradition of the Achaemenid military organization was interrupted after Alexander's invasion and replaced by new Hellenistic patterns which used a different system based on files of 16 soldiers.[17]

The decimal system of military organisation prevailed in Sasanian Iran. Ammianus Marcellinus (18.8.3) describes a corps of 20,000 horsemen under the command of Tamsapor and Nohodares fighting near Amida as part of the Sasanian army in AD 359. In AD 578, Khusro I sent into Mesopotamia a corps of 20,000 soldiers including 12,000 Persians and 8,000 Saracens/Arabs as well as Sabirs (Men. Fr. 23.1). An army led by Khusro II fighting for his throne numbered about 40,000 soldiers recruited in Iran proper (Ṭabarī 1000). In the Battle of Bridge (AD 630s) the Sasanian army numbered 30,000 men.[18]

In light of the above, the maximum number in a Parthian mobile striking force on the battlefield amounted to 50,000 men — a significant size in view of logistics. Normally, a Parthian royal army consisted of between 20,000 and 50,000 men. In some cases, however, the armies could even amount to 120,000 men. The equipment and victuals of such a force must have been extremely expensive and complex.

Under the Sasanians (AD 226-651) the standard field army numbered up to 50,000; this was, for example, the magnitude of King Kavad's army against Belisarius (a corps of 40,000 plus a division of 10,000 from Nisibis: AD 530).[19] At the same time, another Persian corps of 30,000 men operated near Satala.[20] This gives a total of about 80,000 Sasanian soldiers operating in a single theatre of war.[21] In AD 589 King Hormizd IV (AD 579-590) mustered an army of 70,000 soldiers alongside a corps of 12,000 men led by Wahram Chobin against the Turks in Badghis and Herat (Ṭabarī 992). At Qadisiyya the Sasanian

[17] On the structure of Hellenistic armies, see Bar Kochva (1989) 8ff. The basic unit of the Seleukid phalanx was the file made up of 16 soldiers. Alexander III of Macedon extended elements of the decimal system in his army, see Olbrycht (2004) *passim*.

[18] Ṭabarī 2176-2177; Bal'ami (1959) 287. Cf. Pourshariati (2008) 217.

[19] Prok. *Bell.* 1.13.23; 1.14.1. Cf. Widengren (1976) 296.

[20] Prok. *Bell.* 1.15.11. See Howard-Johnston (2012) 109.

[21] The early Sasanian king Shapur I (AD 240-272) defeated a Roman force of 60,000 soldiers at Barbalissos (*ŠKZ*, Greek, lines 10-11). At Edessa Shapur I defeated a mighty Roman force of 70,000 under Valerian (*ŠKZ*, Greek, lines 23-26), took most of them into captivity and deported them to Persis. These overwhelming victories, including the taking of tens of thousands of Romans into captivity, must have resulted from Persian numerical superiority. Thus it seems probable that Shapur's armies operating in Mesopotamia may have numbered more than the Roman forces.

army is said to have numbered between 30,000 and 120,000.[22] Sebeos provides the detail that the "army of the land of the Medes gathered under the command of their general Rostam numbered 80,000 armed men".[23] At Nihavand (AD 642) the numbers recorded for the Sasanian army vary between 50,000 and 150,000. The latter total, given by Ṭabarī (2608), is not improbable for the forces were composed of levied troops from the populous lands of western Iran.

In some wars the Sasanians deployed a small combat force. Wahram Chubin (descending from the old Parthian clan Mihrān in Rayy) led an army of 12,000 "mature and experienced men, not youngsters" against the Turks in Harat and Badghis area (AD 588).[24]

The composition of the Parthian armies

Parthian armies, apart from the main troops of the Arsakid King of Kings, were composed of Parthian clans, such as the Sūrēn and the Kārin, and contingents supplied by dependent kings.[25] Together they formed a composite army, consisting of the following components:

(1) a permanent army, including the royal guards units and royal garrisons in major cities, fortresses and governors' troops in the provinces;
(2) the royal armed forces mobilised in the royal domain in the event of war (forming as it were a 'Parthian national army' composed of levied Parthian forces), including genuine royal troops, and private armies from the clan estates of the nobility from within the royal domain;
(3) armed forces of dependent (vassal) kingdoms;
(4) mercenaries;
(5) allies, often indistinguishable from mercenaries.

[22] Schippmann (1990) 75-76.

[23] Sebeos, *Hist*. 135 (Chapter 42). This total, known for some campaigns of late Sasanians, seems to be reliable.

[24] Ṭabarī 992. The total of 12,000 appears as one of the eschatological numbers in the Zoroastrian tradition. See Pourshariati (2008) 62-63.

[25] Pliny the Elder (*NH* 6.112-113) speaks of "eighteen kingdoms of Parthia" (*regna Parthorum*) in the second half of the first century AD.

THE STANDING ARMY AND NATIONAL LEVIES

Some scholars deny that the Arsakids ever had a standing army, on the grounds of Herodianos' account of the military and diplomatic relations between the Roman pretender Pescennius Niger and Vologases IV.[26] Herodianos (3.1.2) claims that "The Parthian king informed Niger that he would send out an order to his 'satraps' to muster their forces. This was the practice whenever a levy was needed in the absence of mercenaries and a standing army."[27] However, some researchers tend to forget that Herodianos' observation was restricted to a specific political context. First, the impression is that Vologases was deliberately procrastinating about sending any troops to Pescennius Niger, and made his "satraps" the excuse for the delay. The Arsakids supported the rebels in the Roman-ruled territory of Osrhoene who, together with the army of Parthian Adiabene, laid siege to the Roman-held city of Nisibis.[28] Vologases IV appears to have tried to avoid directly supporting Pescennius Niger on a large scale because he deemed as real the possibility of Septimius Severus' victory in the Roman civil war. Besides, Vologases' own royal forces may have been engaged in a war against Persian rebels, as mentioned in the *Chronicle of Arbela*.[29]

Secondly, Herodianos's claim that there was no standing army or mercenaries in Parthia is clearly incorrect. Parthia definitely had mercenaries (for particulars see below), but some commentators overlook this detail, thereby making Herodianos' statement on Parthian royal armed forces untrustworthy.

Thirdly, for Herodianos the standard organisation of an army followed the Roman scheme, with hundreds of thousands of soldiers in the pay of the state. There is no analogy to this in Parthia. What Parthia did have

[26] Wolski (1965) 114; Kennedy (1977) 530. The latter changed his mind and in (1996) 84 writes of a Parthian "permanent but small force." Hauser (2006) 296 n. 5 criticises Kennedy (1977), but glosses over Kennedy (1996).

[27] Herodian. 3.1.2: ὁ δὲ Παρθυαῖος ἐπιστελεῖν ἔφη τοῖς σατράπαις δύναμιν ἀθροίζειν· οὕτω γὰρ εἴωθεν, ὁπηνίκα ἂν δεηθῇ στρατὸν συλλέγειν, τῷ γὰρ εἴωθεν, ὁπηνίκα ἂν δεηθῇ στρατὸν συλλέγειν, τῷ μὴ ἔχειν μισθοφόρους καὶ συνεστὸς στρατιωτικόν.

[28] Cf. Dio 75.1-3. Hanslik (1962) 1851 and Debevoise (1938) 255-256 assume convincingly that this was an action directed by Vologases IV. Ziegler (1964) 130 regards the siege as an independent move by the king of Adiabene. See also Birley (2002) 108-120 for a general view of the civil war in Rome and the involvement of minor Mesopotamian rulers.

[29] Kawerau (1985) 26-28.

was a standing army, but the numbers serving in it were much smaller than in its Roman counterpart. The Parthian standing army consisted of units of the royal guards and contingents supplied by the governors that were stationed at strategic points and in city garrisons. The majority of Parthian soldiers were not paid by the King of Kings or the central treasury. This system worked well and — by way of comparison — similar methods of organization were employed in the highly efficient Mongol empire (13th-14th centuries AD).[30]

The Parthian system of military organisation was continued by the early Sasanian kings in the third-fourth centuries AD. In his account of Alexander Severus during the Persian-Roman war of AD 231-232, Herodianos claims:

> The barbarians, it may be noted, do not hire mercenary soldiers as the Romans do, nor do they maintain trained standing armies. Rather, all the available men, and sometimes the women, too, mobilize at the king's order. At the end of the war each man returns to his regular occupation, taking as his pay whatever falls to his lot from the general booty.[31]

This description juxtaposes both true and false observations. It is beyond any doubt that the Arsakids and Sasanians hired mercenaries and had permanent troops at their disposal. Herodianos' assessment is true in that a portion of the Sasanian army was furnished by nobility with retinues. These soldiers were not paid by the central royal treasury (contrary to the Roman practice) which was incorrectly understood by Roman writers to mean that the Parthians and the early Sasanian kings had no permanent army.

Herodianos claims that the Persian army consisted of soldiers levied by the king:

> The barbarian army, once disbanded, was not easily remustered, as it was not organized on a permanent basis. More a mob than a regular army, the soldiers had only those supplies, which each man brought for himself when he reported for duty. Moreover, the Persians are reluctant to leave their wives, children, and homeland.[32]

Herodianos overlooks the efficiency of Parthian and early Sasanian logistics that enabled the Iranian kings to furnish supplies for armies of

[30] Masson Smith (1975) 280-281.
[31] Herodian. 6.5.3-4 (transl. Echols).
[32] Herodian. 6.7.1 (transl. Echols).

80,000 – 100,000 soldiers in a single theatre of war, as in 36 BC in Media Atropatene. Generally, some of Herodianos's observations about the Parthians and Persians are in many respects imaginative, Roman-centred notions of how armies should be organized and paid.

A conservative estimate of the total number of men who served in the Parthian royal guard (one division of ca. 10,000), troops under the command of satraps, and those who manned garrisons, amounted to at least two divisions of 10,000 men each. Compared to Rome, a standing force of 20,000 men was insignificant. By the end of Augustus' reign, the imperial Roman standing army numbered some 250,000 men, which rose to 364,000 soldiers by about AD 150.[33] But we must not forget that the composition of the Arsakid army was, unlike Imperial Rome, strictly associated with Parthia's social structure and the warlike ethos of its elite. There was universal military service for all males from among the nobility in Parthia's royal domain. Each family and clan provided a certain number of soldiers for the king's army.[34]

THE ARSAKID ROYAL GUARD UNITS

The Arsakids had units of the royal guard at their disposal. The royal guard was essentially cavalry, as evidenced by Tacitus' record of the fighting in Armenia. Vologases I placed the grandee Monaeses in command of the siege operation at Nisibis. King of Kings gave Monaeses

> a body of cavalry, regularly in attendance of the king, which was at hand (...), adding a number of Adiabenian auxiliaries, and commissioned him to eject Tigranes from Armenia; while he himself laid aside his quarrel with Hyrcania and called up his internal forces with the full machinery of war as a threat to the Roman provinces.[35]

Tacitus' account provides an accurate picture of the structure of the Arsakid armed forces in the first century AD. He enumerates a standing army (the royal guard: *prompta equitum manus*, *quae regem ex more*

[33] See Kennedy (1996) 85.

[34] Košelenko (1980) 177-199; Olbrycht (2003).

[35] Tac. *Ann.* 15.2.4: *simul diademate caput Tiridatis evinxit, promptam equitum manum, quae regem ex more sectatur, Monaesi nobili viro tradidit, adiectis Adiabenorum auxiliis, mandavitque Tigranen Armenia exturba[re], dum ipse positis adversus Hyrcanos discordiis vires intimas molemque belli ciet, provinciis Romanis minitans.* Translation after Loeb edition (J. Jackson).

spectatur), auxiliaries or contingents of the dependent kings (in this case Adiabene: *Adiabenorum auxiliis*), and Vologases' Parthian national force, which he calls *moles*. The same term is used for the army of Artabanos II in Iberia in AD 36 (*tota mole regni* – Tac. *Ann*. 6.36.10). Hence the term *moles* may be here understood as armed forces directly available to the King of Kings — his standing army and the general levy from the Arsakid royal domain.

We know for sure that not only Vologases I, but also Phraates IV (Plut. *Ant*. 44.2: περὶ αὐτὸν) and Artabanos II had a royal guard. Foreign mercenaries may have served in it, as happened under Artabanos II (Tac. *Ann*. 6.36.3: *externorum corpori custodes*). As usual in Iranian history, guards consisted of the personal guard of rulers and of the army's crack troops. Usually the core of the personal royal guard was made up of the best soldiers, recruited from aristocratic houses.[36] After the death of Artabanos IV young Parthian aristocrats (referred to in the record as *paides*) engaged in the fighting against Ardashir I alongside an army of Medes and Armenians.[37] A royal battalion of nobles existed under the Sasanian ruler Shapur II (AD 309-379).[38] In Sasanian times, a personal guards' unit of the King numbered usually 500 men.[39] The Arsakid bodyguard included so-called *somatophylakes* (royal bodyguards proper) and *doryphoroi* (spear-bearing guardsmen) whose titles appear in literary sources and in inscriptions. One of the royal *doryphoroi* saved Artabanos IV from a Roman trick in AD 216.[40] Inscriptions from the Arsakid period discovered at Dura, Susa, and in Babylonia mention the institution of royal bodyguards (*somatophylakes*). Actually, *somatophylax* was an honorary title bestowed on a few close acquaintances of the Parthian king. Some of them must have resided at court, but others lived in the major cities, as inscriptions tell us. The title of *somatophylax* is attested for officials from Dura and Seleukeia on the Eulaios/Susa.[41] Tacitus

[36] Arr. *Parthika*, frg. 98 = Suda s.v. ξυστόν· Ἀρριανός· τὰ σημεῖα τῆς ἐπιλέκτου στρατιᾶς ἀετοί, εἰκόνες βασίλειοι, στέμματα, πάντα χρυσᾶ, ἀνατεταμένα ἐπὶ ξυστῶν ἠργυρωμένων.

[37] Dio 80.3.3. See Widengren (1971) 758; Nikonorov (2005) 142.

[38] Amm. 25.5.9 (*regius equitatus*); 24.7.7 (*regis auxilia*); 24.4.31; P'awstos Buzand, *Epic Histories* 4.31. See Nikonorov (2005) 152.

[39] Theophyl. Sim. 5.10.7. Cf. Nikonorov (2005) 153 n. 40.

[40] Herodian. 4.11.5: αὐτός τε Ἀρτάβανος ἁρπαγεὶς ὑπὸ τῶν περὶ αὐτὸν δορυφόρων ἵππῳ τε ἐπιτεθεὶς ἀπέδρα μόλις μετ' ὀλίγων.

[41] *Somatophylakes* at Dura: *P. Dura* 17B (Thommen (2010): III.1.3.D.5); *P. Dura* 18 (Thommen (2010): III.1.3.D.1); *P. Dura* 20 (Thommen (2010): III.1.3.D.2).

(*Ann.* 6.36.3) speaks of *corpores custodi* of Artabanos II who may be identified with the *somatophylakes* of Greek inscriptions. A reference in Philostr. *Apoll.* 1.33 mentions *doryphoroi* and *somatophylakes* of the Parthian king Vardanes, which seem to be a technical use of the terms.[42]

For administrative and military offices the Arsakid kings relied on a circle of collaborators called — in Greek inscriptions from Parthia and classical sources — *syngeneis* ('relatives') and *philoi* ('friends'). These categories were partially modelled on the Seleukid pattern, which in turn had imitated Achaemenid and Macedonian institutions.[43] At the top of the Seleukid court system were the *philoi* divided up into several categories, such as *protoi philoi* (first-ranking) etc. Furthermore, the title *syngenes* also occurs, but quite rarely.[44] The same titles, in some cases with slight modifications, appear in Parthian times. Josephus (*Ant.* 18.99) speaks of Artabanos II's *philoi* and *syngeneis* as his familiar attendants. Philostratos (*Apoll.* 1.33) makes use of the same titles in references to the court of Artabanos' son Vardanes. In accordance with the old Achaemenid tradition,[45] the Arsakid *philoi* (the king's friends) and *syngeneis* (relatives) may conceivably have been members of the royal bodyguard unit.[46]

Artabanos IV (AD 213-224) was said to have had a guard of 4,000 cavalrymen when he fought Ardashir I.[47] A royal unit of 4,000 soldiers called *ǰund šahānšah* under Rostam was fighting at Qadisiyya (AD 638).[48] For Achaemenid times, Herodotos mentions a unit of 4,000 soldiers

Somatophylakes at Susa: Canali De Rossi 2004, no. 204; *SEG* 7, nos. 3 and 6 (Thommen 2010: III.1.3.F.7-8); Artabanos-Letter (Thommen 2010: III.1.3.F.11).

[42] Morano (1996) 139-142 gives a preliminary reading of a recently discovered Nisa ostrakon and proposes to interpret the phrase *darīgān* as "the Palace guards". The reading, assuming that the term was borrowed by the Parthians from Middle Persian, is not convincing. In a Parthian text one should expect rather **brykn*, see Huyse (1999) II 169.

[43] Seleukid *philoi:* Savalli-Lestrade (1998) 3-122; Capdetrey (2007) 278-282.

[44] See Dreyer (2011) 45-57.

[45] Achaemenid *syngeneis* and *philoi*: Wiesehöfer (1980) 7-21; Sekunda (1992) 56-57; Jacobs (1996) 273-284.

[46] Arsakid *philoi*: Savalli-Lestrade (1998) 205-214, nos. 1-11. Cf. Poseidonios, *FrGrHist* 87 F71 (= Strab. 11.9.3) on Parthian double council – one part of relatives (*syngeneis*), the other of wise men and magoi; id., F5 (= Athen. 4.152 F) (grotesque picture of Parthian *philoi*).

[47] *Kārnāmak* 4.8, 4.18, 4.24, ed. Chunakova (1987).

[48] The soldiers from this unit asked for peace provided they be allowed to settle wherever they wanted and receive soldiers' stipends. Their request was granted (al-Balādhurī apud Hitti (1916) 440-441). Khusro II Abarviz brought the 4,000 soldiers from Daylam who acted as his servants and escort and served up to the Arab conquest. See also Tafazzoli (2000) 5.

(2,000 infantrymen and 2,000 cavalrymen) as the core of the guard of Xerxes (486-465 BC) numbering 10,000 soldiers; in some sources they are called 'Immortals' (in Greek *athanatoi*).[49] A corps of 10,000 Sasanian crack soldiers termed *athanatoi* appears in the Byzantine and Syriac records as part of the Sasanian armies in the fifth-sixth centuries AD.[50] They may have been called the *gund ī šāhān šāh* in Middle Persian.[51] Thus it seems that the regular strength of the royal guard in Iran was about 10,000 men but the corps often operated as smaller units depending on tactical aims. The young Shapur II selected a regiment of 1,000 cavalrymen from among "the stoutest and most heroic of the troops". He conducted rapid operations to kill and destroy any Arab troops on the way.[52] When Vologases I's brother Tiridates, King of Armenia, went to Rome in AD 65-66 he was attended by 3,000 Parthian horsemen (Dio 63.2.1). This was certainly only part of his guard. In 53 BC Artavasdes II of Armenia had a guard division of 6,000 cavalrymen (Plut. *Crass*. 19.1). The Arsakids were the paragons whom the Armenians emulated, and could not have had a smaller guard. Therefore, the estimated size of the Arsacid royal guard falls within the range of 6,000 to 10,000 men. The latter figure is based on the standard number for major divisions of the Parthian army. It is thus conceivable that the total number of men who served in the royal guard forces must have amounted to one such division. As stated above, a division of 10,000 soldiers is often mentioned in sources as a corps or fraction of the Parthian or Partho-Armenian armies (see MX 2.7; 2.8; 1.14).

The regular forces at the king's disposal must have been relatively large, if in the first century BC the Arsakids were worried that their royal forces might go on a rampage against the inhabitants of Seleukeia. The Arsacids established their royal seat at Ktesiphon, opposite Seleukeia, "in order that the Seleukeians might not be oppressed by having the Scythian folk or soldiery quartered amongst them" (Strab. 16.1.16). The Parthian official called 'the Governor of Akkad' (i.e. of Babylonia)

[49] Hdt. 7.55; 7.40f. Xen. *Kyr*. 8.3.15-16 knows 6,000 doryphoroi. Cf. also Xen. *Kyr*. 7.5.68; *De Mundo* 398a; Herakleides, *FrGrHist* 689 F1 (1,000 *doryphoroi* as selected from 10,000 *melophoroi*).

[50] Socrates Scholasticus (*HE* 7.20) knows of a corps of Persian soldiers distinguished by the name of 'The Immortals' under Bahram V. See also Prokop. *Bell*. 1.14.31; 44; 45; 49; Theophan. *Chron*. A. M. 5918; Michael the Syrian 8.3. See Shahbazi (1987) 497; Nikonorov (2005) 152.

[51] Tafazzoli (2000) 5.

[52] Ṭabarī 838.

often visited the King's Encampment (*madakti šarri*), located on the east bank of the Tigris.[53] The location may be identified with the site of Ktesiphon.

Mercenaries

The Arsakids often availed themselves of the services of nomadic mercenaries, such as the Sakas in the reign of Phraates II (*mercede*: Iust. 42.1.2). The Sarmatians were a regular feature in this tradition, as exemplified in the war of AD 36 (Tac. *Ann.* 6.33.2-3; 6.36.3).[54]

It is not clear what role prisoners-of-war played, after the Arsakids had incorporated them into their own forces. Thousands of Greeks were assimilated into Phraates II's army after the defeat of Antiochos VII Sidetes in 130-129 BC (Iust. 42.1.4-5). They were probably not regular mercenaries, but they must have received some kind of basic pay for their service. The same fate must have befalled to the thousands of Romans taken into Parthian captivity at Carrhae in 53 BC.[55]

The Arsakid royal forces recruited in the royal domain: the Parthian national army

Parthian society was structured along the same hierarchical principle that operated in the military, comprising nobles and commoners. The main principle defining the social structure of Parthia was a distinct and rigid stratification with a very small elite and the vast majority of the populace as menial subjects, retainers or servants. The Arsakid clan stood at the apex of the structure.[56] Next to it were the great families, including the most powerful Sūrēn and Kārin. These great clans formed the highest rank amongst the so-called 'freemen' (Parthian *āzādān*, Latin *liberi*, Greek *eleutheroi*). The rest of the nobles were ordinary knights of a lower status, whose social relation to the king and grandees was that of vassals or subservient subjects (Parthian *bandag*, Greek *pelatai*, in Justin

[53] Mitsuma (2004) 80.

[54] Cf. Wolski (1965).

[55] Plin. *NH* 6.47; Solin. 48.3; Flor. 2.20.4-5; Vell. 2.82.2. See also Hor. *Carm.* 3.5.5-9; Dio 54.8.1; Iust. 42.5.11. Wolski (1965) 107 treats them as mercenaries.

[56] For the social structure of Parthia, see Košelenko (1980); Olbrycht (2003).

the elite of the *servitiores*). The grandees and lesser nobles constituted the so-called 'equestrian estate' (Parthian *asbārān*, Greek *hippeis*, Latin *equites*). They were followed by the estate comprising peasants and townsmen, i.e. the sedentary population of Parthia proper, Media, Hyrcania and other areas in Iran that the Parthians had conquered. A significant number of them were recruited into the Parthian army.

Military service was compulsory for the nobility and some of the commoners. It operated on a system resembling to some degree the Persian military organisation of the Achaemenids.[57] Some soldiers were retainers of Parthian grandees and minor nobles who were obliged to provide the King of Kings with conscripts. All Parthian males underwent many years of military training before being enlisted into the armed forces (the same applied to other Iranian countries like Media, Hyrcania and Persis). In the Parthian ethos the skills of horsemanship, archery, and hunting were considered the most important of all virtues and personal accomplishments, which made for an extremely high standard of military prowess among the Parthian elite. Justin (41.3.4) offers a vivid picture of the Parthian ethos and states that the Parthians

> ride horses constantly, using them to go to war and to feasts, and for all private and public functions. On them they travel, halt, conduct business and hold conversations. In fact, the only clear difference between slaves (servi) and freemen (liberi) is that slaves travel on foot, freemen invariably on horseback.

A similar picture is offered by Herodianos 6.5.4, who stresses that the Persians and Parthians

> use the bow and the horse in war, as the Romans do, but the barbarians are reared with these from childhood, and live by hunting; they never lay aside their quivers or dismount from their horses, but employ them constantly for war and the chase.[58]

Cassius Dio claims that the Parthians "practise from boyhood, and the climate and the land combine to aid both horsemanship and archery" (40.15.2). Ammianus Marcellinus (23.6.83) states that the Parthians

[57] Achaemenid military organisation: Hdt. 1.136; Strab. 15.3.18; Xen. *Kyr*. 1.2.8-9; 1.2.13-15.

[58] Herodian. 6.5.4 (transl. Echols). Herodianos describes the army of Ardashir I a few years after the death of Artabanos IV, but his record pertains to the Parthian period too. The ethos of the Parthian aristocracy was similar (although not identical) to that of the Persian one.

relied especially on the valour of their cavalry, in which all the nobles and men of rank underwent 'hard service.'

The field armies of the Arsakid Parthians relied on the cavalry as their infantry was relatively weak. In defensive operations, however, the Arsakids could furnish good infantry units, e.g. in Atropatene, Adiabene, Babylonia, Hatra, and in the Kyrtian (Kyrtioi) land (fringes of western Media). The Mardians from the Alborz area mustered excellent light infantry troops. Phraates I fought the Mardians, whom Justin (41.5.9) describes as a powerful enemy (*validam gentem*).[59] The Mardians (also called Amardians in accounts) inhabited an area in the Alborz mountains and foothills, bordering on Hyrcania in the east and Media in the south-west. Their neighbours were the Deylamites and Cadusians on the Caspian Sea.[60]

The Parthian cavalry comprised mounted archers (*hippotoxotai* / *equites sagittarii*), heavily-armoured cavalrymen (*kataphraktoi*) and spearmen (*kontophoroi*) (Dio 40.15.2).

A high standard of military training was the hallmark of the cavalry particularly for the cataphracts, who had to spend many years training to master the art of charging and fighting clad in heavy armour and using heavy spears. The general levy called up from the royal domain and from the Dahae (famous as mounted archers) or Sakan clans in eastern Iran,which furnished cataphracts and horse archers, consisted of highly trained armed forces.

Justin (41.2.5-6) gives an account of the Parthian national army and states the following:

> Their army differs from that of other races in being composed mostly of serfs (*servitiores*) rather than freemen (*liberi*). It is the extent of an individual's wealth that determines the number of horsemen with which he supplies the king for service in war. In fact, when Antony

[59] Groups of deported Mardians were settled in Charax (Isid. *Stathm.* 7), a colony located at the foot of Mt. Caspius, not far from the Caspian Gates (south-east of present-day Teheran).

[60] On Mardians/Amardians, see Strab. 11.7.1; 11.8.8; 11.13.6; Diod. 17.76.3; Curt. 6.5.11; Mela 3.39; 42; Plin. *NH* 6.36; 47; Dionys. Per. 732f. (*GGM* II 149); Steph. Byz. s.v *Mardoi*. Apart from the Mardians, who inhabited the area between the Caspian Sea and the Alborz mountains, there were tribes called by the same name in Azerbaijan as well as along the Persis border. The Mardians who fought at Gaugamela as an elite contingent in the army of Darius III (331 BC – Arr. 3.11.5, 3.13.1) probably came from the Persis frontier.

> launched his attack on the Parthians, he was met by 50,000 cavalry (*equites*), of whom only 400 were freemen (*liberi*).[61]

It is thus clear that every aristocrat who was a member of the *āzādān* (free men) class was obliged to do military service and, depending on the value of his estate, was expected to supply a unit of soldiers. Zamaris, a Jewish nobleman from Babylonia living in the reign of Phraates IV, had a troop of 500 mounted archers and 100 kinsmen (*syngeneis*: Ios. *Ant*. 17.23).[62] The Armenian historian P'awstos Buzand attests to the existence of this system in third-century AD Armenia under the Arsakid King Khosrov. Anxious to prevent the defection of the nobility, the king is said to have enacted a law that

> the greatest-magnates, the nakharars, the keepers-of-realms, the lords-of-realms, those with [contingents] of a myriad or a thousand [men], should stay with the king and accompany him and not a single one of them was to go out with the royal army.[63]

This passage reflects the pattern of mobilisation in Arsakid Armenia, exactly modelled on the mobilisation system of Arsakid Iran.

The mobilisation strength of the Arsakid royal forces

The main source of information on the military situation in Western Asia in the first century BC is provided by Strabo's *Geography*, which relies on a handful of accounts of the reign of Mithradates VI of Pontos and Roman activities in Western Asia in the late Republic and early Empire.[64] Unfortunately, the work does not provide much in the way of numerical data for the lands south of Atropatene (Iranian Azerbaijan), which were incorporated in the Arsakid royal domain. In addition,

[61] *Exercitum non, ut aliae gentes, liberorum, sed maiorem partem servitiorum habent, quorum vulgus nulli manumittendi potestate permissa ac per hoc omnibus servis nascentibus in dies crescit. Hos pari ac liberos suos cura et equitare et sagittare magna industria docent. Locupletissimus ut quisque est, ita plures in bella equites regi suo praebet. Denique Antonio bellum Parthis inferenti cum L milia equitum occurrissent, soli CCCC liberi fuere.*

[62] Zamaris: Ios. *Ant*. 17.24-29. Cf. Kennedy (1977) 529, (1996) 84.

[63] P'awstos Buzand, *Epic Histories* 3.8. See Dodgeon & Lieu (1994) 258.

[64] On Strabo's *Geography*, its sources, and the accounts of Western and Central Asia, see Traina (2001); Olbrycht (2001); Biffi (2002); Biffi (2005).

Plutarch in his *Life of Crassus* and *Life of Antony* supplies some relevant information on the subject.[65]

One of the constituent parts of the Arsakid royal domain was Greater Media. In his description of the country, Strabo does not list any figures for its military forces (11.13.5-11), but he does describe the region as having been more powerful economically than Atropatene, with "exceptionally good horse-pasturing country, comparable to the resources in Armenia, including the Nisaian plain." Greater Media had many more cities than Atropatene, including one of the Parthian capitals, Ekbatana, and the old metropolis of Rhaga (Rayy). Polybios (5.44.1-4) is even more explicit on the dominant status of Media in (Western) Asia. Thus, Polybios claims that

> it is difficult indeed to speak in adequate terms of the strength and extent of the district. Media lies in the middle of Asia, and looked at as a whole, is superior in size and in the height of its mountain ranges to any other district in Asia.

He adds that "Media itself has several mountain chains running across it from east to west between which lie plains full of towns and villages."[66] The historian highlights the economic power of Media in connection with Molon's rebellion.[67]

Greater Media was renowned for its excellent horses and had a long tradition of a first-rate cavalry.[68] Strabo underscores that Media was a "horse-breeding country" like Armenia. The famous Nesaian horses, bred in Media, were regarded as the best and the largest horses known in antiquity (Strab. 11.3.7). It was presumably for these reasons, as well as thanks to its favourable conditions for horse-breeding, that the Median cavalry was far more numerous than its Atropatenian counterpart. On the basis of a cautious comparison with Atropatene (standard mobilisation strength of 40,000 infantry and 10,000 cavalry, see below), one may speculate that Greater Media could have furnished at least as many men as its lesser neighbour, viz. a force of 50,000, 20,000 of which could have been cavalry. I am admitting a number twice the size of that for Atropatene, slightly larger than for Armenia (16,000), and fairly close to what the smaller territory of Caucasian Albania could have supplied

[65] On Parthia's affairs in Plutarch's works, see Hartmann (2008).
[66] Transl. by W.R. Paton.
[67] Polyb. 5.45.1.
[68] See Herzfeld (1968) 1-29; Drews (2004) 86-120.

(22,000).[69] The tribes inhabiting the mountains of Media and along its marches served in the infantry (Kyrtoi, Mardians). The Kyrtioi (Latin *Cyrtii*) were, according to Strabo, predatory brigands (Strab. 11.13.3; cf. 15.3.1). They served as slingers for Seleukid armies and fought for the Median satrap Molon in his revolt from Antiochos III in 220 BC (Polyb. 5.52), as well as for Antiochos himself near Magnesia in 190 BC (Livius 37.40.9, 14). They even served in the Roman army as part of the auxiliary troops of Eumenes II in the battle against Perseus at Kallinikos in 171 BC (Livius 42.58.13). That 50,000 soldiers was the standard mobilized strength for Greater Media is implied by a comparison with what we know of the late Achaemenid period: the Median army consisted of at least 60,000 soldiers.[70]

The Parthians, natives of Khorasan and part of the Transcaspian steppes, who were the dominant people in the Arsakid empire, were no worse than the Medes in terms of the number of conscripts that they could muster, so that we may ascribe a force of the same strength to them, that is 50,000. The cavalry, however, must have accounted for a greater proportion of this number than was the case in Media. Parthia had an excellent tradition for cavalry, but virtually no infantry tradition except for some highlanders (including the Mardians) in the eastern Alborz and in the Khorasan's mountain ranges.[71] In view of the overwhelming preponderance of cavalry over infantry in the army of Parthia proper, one may assume that the Parthian proportion was the inverse of the Atropatenian, viz. 40,000 cavalry to 10,000 infantry.

For the purpose of this analysis, I shall treat the smaller provinces adjoining Parthia — Hyrcania, Areia, and Margiana — as integral parts of the military complex of Parthia proper (Khorasan). There are no precise descriptions of the military potential of these lesser regions (except for Achaemenid Hyrcania's cavalry division of 6,000 in 333 BC),[72] but we may conjecture that their joint military potential went into the tens of

[69] Atropatene, Albania and Armenia formed a cluster of lands that shared military and political developments. Thus, e.g., beginning in the second century BC these lands had a cavalry of the cataphract type (Strabo 11.14.9).

[70] At Issos in 333 BC the Medes mustered 10,000 cavalry and 50,000 infantry (Curt. 3.2.4, 3.9.5). See Vogelsang (1992) 220. Their number at Gaugamela is not known (Arr. *an*. 3.8.4; Curt. 4.12.12).

[71] Parthians and Hyrcanians together fought as cavalry at Gaugamela (331 BC), demonstrating their sophisticated military skills (Arr. *an*. 3.8.4; Curt. 4.12.11).

[72] Issos: Curt. 3.2.6, 3.9.5. Hyrcanians also fought on the Graneikos (Diod. 17.19.4) in 334 BC.

thousands, up to 30,000 altogether, assuming a minimum of 10,000 armed men in each of these countries.

The forces of Sakastan amounted to at least 15,000 cavalrymen (Surenas' expeditionary army coupled with the probable homeland's defence, calculated as half of the expeditionary force). There was also Carmania, which had close ties with the Arsakids. Strabo's account (15.2.14) implies that this land did not provide much in the way of a cavalry.[73] In terms of size, Carmania was nearly as vast as Parthia proper, but the population in this largely rural country was probably smaller than that in Khorasan.[74] In an attempt to avoid an error and remain on the side of caution, I shall allow for only a fraction of the military potential of Parthia or Media for Carmania, at no more than 15,000 soldiers, a total comparable with that of tiny Elymais. Auxilia from Carmania and Hyrcania formed the core of the powerful army of Artabanos II in AD 36 (Tac. *Ann.* 6.36.4).

From the second half of the second century BC, Susiana was in Parthian hands, but we know nothing about its military role as part of the empire. It was considered one of the most powerful districts in terms of economy and wealth (particularly under Phraates IV and Artabanos II), and hence, again to be conservative, I shall rate it at 10,000 men (infantry and some cavalry) at least (less than the amount reckoned for the adjacent country of Elymais). The military potential of Elymais was definitely greater (an army of 15,000 is attested for it in 124 BC), but the Arsakids forfeited the country intermittently.[75] The same may be said of Persis, and hence I shall not count these two regions in the royal domain, but as part of the lands that formed Arsakid dependent kingdoms.

The cities and districts of Babylonia and Mesopotamia had military forces of their own (urban militias), which included Greeks and Babylonians in Seleukeia on the Tigris and minor centres like Uruk, Babylon, Nippur, and Borsippa. We learn of Babylonians fighting against the Jewish uprising in the times of Artabanos II (Ios. *Ant.* 18.318-324). The Jewish communities had their own armed forces (e.g. Zamaris' contingent).[76] The overall mobilisation strength of the city militias in

[73] Strabo states that because of the scarcity of horses most of the Carmanians used asses, even for war; and they sacrificed an ass to Ares, the only god whom they worshiped, and concludes that they were a warlike people.

[74] For the history and culture of Carmania, see Potts (1989) 581-603.

[75] For Elymais and Susiana, see Le Rider (1965); Hansman (1998).

[76] Olbrycht (2013) 116-120.

Babylonia and Mesopotamia must certainly have been in excess of 10,000 men, but I shall stick to this figure, so as not to arrive at an overestimate. The cavalry tradition in Susiana and Babylonia/Mesopotamia was weak, and hence one can assume that the cavalry formed just a small, insignificant fraction of the mobilisation strength of these countries.

Thus the overall estimated figure for the armed forces directly under the Arsakids from the first century BC to the first century AD in the royal domain (Parthia and its adjoining territories including Hyrcania, Areia and Margiana, Greater Media, Babylonia/Mesopotamia, Susiana, Carmania, and Sakastan) totals 180,000 men, half of whom composed the cavalry. To this figure we should add the royal guard units of about 10,000 and at least 10,000 for local garrisons as well as an undetermined number of governors' troops. If we add the forces of Atropatene (in the Arsakid royal domain from Phraates IV or Artabanos II onwards), we arrive at 250,000 men. Yet this is by far not the maximum capacity of the armies in the service of the Arsakids, who could also count on contingents from their vassal/client states or allies — Persis, Elymais, Albania, Charakene, the clans of Bactria, and Armenia — as well as mercenaries, bringing up the total certainly by more than an additional 100,000 men. We may thus conclude that the military potential in terms of mobilisation strength of the Arsakid Crown lands (dastgerd) was large, and that in the event of war the Arsakids could rally over 200,000 men in the first century BC. Taking into account Atropatene as a part of the royal domain, the Arsakid forces would be about 250,000 in the first century AD. However, we should bear in mind that half this amount was not expedient for a field army in view of the huge costs logistically and the loss of mobility due to excessively large military concentrations. Taking into account the estimated mobilisation strength of Parthia, Greater Media and Media Atropatene (as a part of the Arsakid royal domain), we arrive at a total of about 150,000 men. This number increased by about 46,000 after Armenia had been subjugated by Vologases I (AD 51-79).

Several sources present a figure of 120,000 soldiers for the Arsakid armies.[77] Usually, they have been disregarded by the scholars, but a reassessment of it makes this figure believable. Phraates I was able to

[77] Porphyrios *FrGrHist* 260 F 32 (19) [*BNJ* 260 F 32](from Eusebios' *Chronographia*). Porphyrios' figure is probably taken from the reliable historian of the late Seleukids, Poseidonios of Apameia. That Porphyrios used Poseidonios as his source, is confirmed by T67 Edelstein & Kidd. See Malitz (1983) 59.

muster 120,000 soldiers in his campaign against the invading force led by Antiochos VII Sidetes in 129/128 BC. The estimates provided above make such a number credible. The population of Parthia proper, Hyrcania, Areia, most parts of Media (not occupied by Antiochos' forces) and the tribal levies of the Dahae may have easily furnished more than 120,000 soldiers.

The figure of 120,000 soldiers given for the army of Vologases IV (AD 193-207/208) in the *Chronicle of Arbela* merits a closer look. According to the Chronicle of Arbela, Vologases IV mustered 120,000 soldiers for his campaign against the "Persian and Median" rebels.[78] The figure of 120,000 soldiers may mirror the manpower of the Arsakid army under Vologases IV, including Parthia proper, Media Atropatene and most of Greater Media. Apparently, Vologases IV deployed his total forces to fight a dangerous rebellion in Persis. The presence of Medes alongside the rebellious Persians may look surprising, but can be easily explained. The uprising of Ardashir in Persis, occurring a few years after Vologases IV's reign, was supported by the great Parthian clans, including the house of Kārin, some of whose lands were located in Media.[79] Conceivably the Kārin clan had supported some earlier uprisings too, including the rebellion mentioned in the *Chronicle of Arbela*. This is probably why this source speaks of the Medes fighting against the Parthians. At the same time most of Greater Media supported Vologases IV's son Artabanos IV against Ardashir I.[80]

Incidentally, the figure of 120,000 soldiers given in some sources for the Arsakid armies is identical to the mobilisation strength of the Persian national army 600 years earlier. Xenophon (*Kyr*. 1.2.15) mentions the figure of 120,000 Persians, which might represent the total strength of the Persian national army.[81] The figure of 120,000 *kardakes* in Arrian (*An*. 3.5.16) may also signify this total.[82] For his Indian war, Alexander of Macedon furnished a huge invasion army of 120,000 soldiers, probably imitating the size of Persian Achaemenid armies. Most of Alexander's

[78] Kawerau (1985) 41-42. In my view, the *Chronicle of Arbela* is of great value for the Parthian period (see also Widengren (1983) 1276). Contra Kettenhofen (1995) 287–319.

[79] Olbrycht (2013) 29.

[80] See Widengren (1971) 748-752 (Ardashir versus districts of Media); Olbrycht (2016).

[81] Sekunda (1992) 5.

[82] Sekunda (1992) 53. Curtius (3.2.4) offers a figure of about 100,000 Persian soldiers including 30,000 cavalry for the battle of Issos in 333 BC.

soldiers were of Asian origin.[83] Furthermore, the Seleukid army of Antiochos III in 209 BC, invading Parthia and Bactria, numbered 100,000 infantry and 20,000 cavalry (Iust. 41.5.7). The figure of 120,000 soldiers is later repeated in Sasanian Iran. For example, the Persian army at Qadisiyya (AD 638) is said to have numbered 120,000 soldiers (versus ca. 9-10,000 Moslems).[84]

The troops of the Parthian grandees

The Arsakid king could call upon the services of the Parthian grandees. Essentially, this class of military forces was enlisted from the royal domain, but for the purposes of this analysis it will be treated separately. The great houses of Parthia secured a special status for themselves and monopolised all of the highest offices in the state. Their estates gradually turned into semi-independent regions and principalities. In the empire's military affairs the most important clans were the Sūrēn and the Kārin, and they were the ones who rallied the largest aristocratic forces. Surenas had an army of about 10,000 soldiers at Carrhae. The rebellions of the Parthian grandees under Artabanos II in AD 36, and under Gotarzes II in AD 49, relied on clan forces of the Sūrēn and Kārin families.[85] When Tiridates II crossed the Euphrates and entered Parthia in AD 36, he was supported by Ornospades, governor (*praefectus*) of Mesopotamia, with several thousand cavalrymen (Tac. *Ann.* 6.37.3: *multis equitus milibus*). This force was augmented by the retinues of Sinnakes and Abdagases, both from the Sūrēn clan (Tac. *Ann.* 6.37.3-4).

In AD 49 some Parthian nobles arrived with their retinues at Zeugma on the Euphrates to support the usurper Meherdates, who was aided by Rome (Tac. *Ann.* 12.2.2). Alongside these forces, Meherdates won the support of Abgaros of Osrhoene and Izates of Adiabene. Both proved politically volatile. The backbone of Meheradtes' army was made up of

[83] Curt. (8.5.4) and Nearchos (*FGrHist* 133 F 1 = Arr. *Ind.* 19.5) write of 120,000 soldiers in Alexander's army in India. Plutarch knows of 120,000 infantry and 15,000 cavalry in the king's army in India (*Alex.* 66.5). Conceivably, Plutarch, having considered the number of frontline cavalry, added it to the total of the royal armed forces in error.

[84] Al-Balādhurī (Hitti (1916) 410. Other records provide lower numbers beginning with 30,000 men, see Schippmann (1990) 75-76.

[85] Olbrycht (2013) 29-32.

the forces of the Kārin (Tacitus' Carenes), which joined the usurper's army in the southern marches of Armenia (Tac. *Ann.* 12.12.2-12.13.2).

Until the early first century AD the territory of Sakastan appears to have been divided between the Sūrēn and the king of the Saka (Isidoros, *Stathmoi* 17-18 lists Drangiana/Zarangiane and the Saka land separately). We do not have enough information to discern exactly what the relations between the Sūrēn and the Saka clans were like, but we do know that that Surenas had a cavalry corps of about 10,000 at the battle of Carrhae (Plut. *Crass.* 21.7), which presumably made up only part of the military potential of his clan in Sakastan.[86] Some of his troops, at least 5,000 men (half of the expeditionary corps), must have remained in Sakastan to defend his homeland against potential threats. The principal lands of the Kārin were situated in Media and perhaps in some parts of Khorasan.[87] The same system of aristocratic contingents existed in Sasanian Iran. Sources speak of 'major princes' (*potissimi duces*) and their retinues (Amm. 24.6.12; 25.3.13).

Troops in the provinces and strongholds

We do not have complete information on the administrative structure of the Arsakid state and the precise nomenclature used for the governors of the provinces of Parthia.[88] I examine this issue in detail elsewhere. My purpose here is to examine what information we possess that will allow for the reconstruction of how the Parthian war machine operated at the provincial level.

The Parthian Empire was divided into large districts or provinces (conventionally referred to by some scholars as satrapies), under governors called *strategoi* in Greek inscriptions and many literary testimonials, or marzbans (*marzpān*/*marzbān* in the Parthian texts from Nisa), or in some cases simply satraps (Parthian *xšahrap*).[89] The bottom-to-top

[86] On the Sūrēn clan, see Olbrycht (2013) 27-32. On the Parthian great clans, see Wolski (1967) 133-144, (1981) 105-112, (1989) 221-227.

[87] In the sixth century AD, Kārin Jibali, governor of Khorasan, commanded an army of 30,000 men. See al-Dīnawarī cited in Kolesnikov (1970) 126.

[88] See Lukonin (1983); Bader (1996); Khurshudian (1998).

[89] On Parthian governors see Khurshudian (1998) 19-72. See also Bengtson (1964) 277-307. B. Jacobs' account of Parthian administration and warfare ('Verwaltung', 84-100, 'Militärwesen', 104-107, in Heckel e.a. (2010), vol. 1) is not very helpful, and can hardly be called even a reliable overview of the work done so far. It fails to mention

hierarchy in the Old Nisa texts is *dizpat – xšahrap – marzpān/marzbān*.[90] The term *xšahrap/satrapes* occurs several times in the literary records.[91] The records for Adiabene (Ios. *Ant*. 20-17-33, esp. 20.26) speak of grandees (*megistanes*), satraps and 'commander(s) of the army.' Here the term 'satraps' probably stands for minor governors of districts within the confines of Adiabene, but the situation in the other parts of Parthia was no doubt analogous.[92] In AD 36 Ornospades, governor (*praefectus*) of Mesopotamia, had several thousand cavalrymen among his provincial troops (Tac. *Ann*. 6.37.3). Thereby the strength of the governor's army in Mesopotamia may be estimated to have been about 5,000 men.

Herodianos' (3.1.2) usage of the term *satrapes* for Parthian governors tends to be taken too literally. Under the Arsakids it was usually not the satraps (except for extraordinary situations), but the *strategoi* and marzbans, who were responsible for military contingents from the provinces (including in some cases forces of allied local rulers). So Herodianos did not use the term *satrapes* in the technical sense.[93]

The satrapies, especially those on the marches of the empire, were fortified with royal strongholds garrisoned with troops. This was the situation at Susa (an important city bordering on the dependent kingdom of Elymais), at Old Nisa (in Parthia proper, near the steppes), and in Margiana. In Mesopotamia and Babylonia there was a whole network of strongholds. Hatra developed into a large stronghold in the borderlands with Rome, with a cluster of smaller forts springing up in its vicinity in the second century AD.[94] A key stronghold was Dura Europos on the Euphrates, the Parthian-Seleukid border and Parthian-Roman border. There was a Parthian garrison at Birtha (now Bireçik)

important contributions (e.g., from Bader (1996), Khurshudian (1998), and even Bengtson's 1964 publication in German); it misses important sources; and it omits a proper examination of the functions of the *strategoi* and satraps.

[90] Khurshudian (1998) 58-62.

[91] Dio 40.12. Strab. 15.3.18 may refer to Achaemenid times. On the office of satrap in Parthia, see Lukonin (1983) 726.

[92] For satraps as minor governors, see already Bengtson (1964) 296-297.

[93] In a paragraph on the organisation of the Parthian army, Hauser (2006) 311-312 describes the Achaemenid system, in which the *satrap* played a key role. He then proceeds to make the groundless claim that "the Arsakid empire could well have used the same system of military organisation in which the kings and satraps were responsible for the order and peace of their respective provinces." But except for Herodianos's account he does not provide even a single example of how this system was supposed to have operated under the Parthians. Unfortunately, he has no discussion at all about the rank of the satraps, *strategoi*, and other officials in the Arsakid administration.

[94] Sommer (2005) 355-390.

on the east bank of the Euphrates downstream from Zeugma; a Syriac inscription names a 'military commander of Birtha'.[95] Isidoros of Charax (*Stathmoi* 1) writes of several places in Mesopotamia referred to as fortresses. Parthian strongholds and fortified towns are reported in Roman sources.[96] This is not a full list of Parthian fortresses, but it shows that the Arsakids took care to protect their lands against enemy incursions and rebellions by establishing a network of forts, strongholds and fortified cities. Cassius Dio (40.14.1) describes the Parthians as a people who "dwell beyond the Tigris, for the most part in forts and garrisons, but also in cities, among them Ktesiphon, in which they have a royal residence."[97] Likewise the Chinese chronicle *Hanshu* depicts Anxi (Parthia) of the first century BC – first century AD as a highly urbanized state, with "several hundreds of cities, small and large".[98] Within the entire royal domain the numbers garrisoning the fortresses from Dura Europos to Old Nisa and Antiocheia/Merv must have been in the thousands.

The armed forces of Arsakid dependent kingdoms

Following the conquest of the lands of the Seleukids, the Arsakids became lords of a host of minor kingdoms which had sprung up on the ashes of the Seleukid state. These included Charakene/Mesene, Elymais, Persis, Osrhoene, Adiabene, and Gordyene. Most of these principalities became political dependencies of the Arsakids and were obliged to provide military contingents, as happened, for example, with Atropatene, Edessa, and Adiabene (Edessa and Adiabene: Tac. *Ann*. 12.12.2-3-12.13; 15.14.1-3; 15.29.4; Atropatene as Parthian dependent kingdom in 36 BC: Dio 48.25.1-2; 48.33.1). By analogy with Rome, we may speak of Arsakid client states, effectively as part of their empire. They may be labelled *regna minora* (after Ovid. *her*. 11.16), to distinguish them from the Roman and Parthian empires proper.

[95] Maricq (1962) 97.

[96] Dio 40.12.2; 40.13.1; 40.14.1; Plin. *NH* 6.119 (*oppidum munitum*); Tac. *Ann*. 6.41.2; 12.13.2; Philostr. *VA* 1.21 (φρουρά)

[97] οἰκοῦσι δὲ ὑπὲρ τοῦ Τίγριδος τὸ μὲν πολὺ τείχη καὶ φρούρια, ἤδη δὲ καὶ πόλεις, ἄλλας τε καὶ Κτησιφῶντα, ἐν ᾗ καὶ βασίλεια ἔχουσι.

[98] Hulsewé (1979) 116.

The Arsakids never intended to establish an empire directly ruled as a single entity. The political reality, which they inherited from the Seleukids, entailed a cluster of stalwart local principalities. Pliny the Elder was not at all wrong in claiming that there were "eighteen kingdoms (regna) of Parthia in all."[99] Pliny's account probably relates to the state of affairs in the 50s and 60s AD, when Rome's attention to Parthia was growing in connection with their rivalry over Armenia under Nero. Pliny writes of two zones of petty kingdoms: one in the south along the Persian Gulf and the coast of the Indian Ocean; and another in the north along the Armenian border and the coast of the Caspian Sea. The central Arsakid domain left the northern and southern flanks of Iran and Mesopotamia in the hands of the dependent rulers. The Arsakid domain is described in the *Stathmoi Parthikoi* by Isidoros of Charax.[100] In the first half of the 1st century AD Margiana, Hyrcania and Sakastan along with Arachosia were transformed into minor kingdoms.[101]

Atropatene, Adiabene, Osrhoene, Gordyene, Albania, the Cadusii, Deylam, Hyrcania, Dahestan (Parthi Nomades), and (as of the first century AD) Margiana, were among the eleven regna superiora (not counting Armenia) listed by Pliny. Charakene, Elymais, Persis (it may have been divided into smaller districts), possibly Makran and Indo-Parthia (in Sakastan and Arachosia), and Carmania perhaps as of the mid-first century AD were the main *regna inferiora*, of which there were seven altogether. In the latter half of the first century AD, Sakastan and Arachosia were in the hands of the Indo-Parthians, but earlier, in the reign of Phraates IV, both of these large countries were within the borders of the Parthian Empire, as Isidoros of Charax relates.[102] Each of the *regna minora* had an armed force, which in some cases (e.g. Atropatene) numbered as many as 50,000 soldiers. So for an accurate estimate of the military potential of the Parthian Empire, we need to take into account the resources of the dependent/vassal states.

[99] Plin. *NH* 6.112-113 (6.29).

[100] Isidoros's account mirrors the composition of the state during the reign of Phraates IV (37-3 BC). On Isidoros: Kramer (2003).

[101] Olbrycht (2013) 122-132, 152-157.

[102] Indo-Parthians: Bivar (2002), (2007).

Armenia

I shall start the analysis of the armed forces of the client states with Armenia, despite the fact that for a long time this land oscillated between Rome and Parthia, and because of this did not become a permanent component of the Parthian Empire until the mid-first century AD.[103] Armenia became a dependency of the Arsakids in the reign of Mithradates II (122-87 BC), and Tigranes II, who, as the heir to the Armenian throne, spent many years at Mithradates' court. The struggle for power in Parthia after the death of Mithradates II and the Roman attacks on Armenia brought about a loosening of its ties with Parthia; nonetheless, in the course of the first century BC there were periods when Armenia acted as a close ally of Parthia. Under Vologases I, Armenia became an Arsakid secundogeniture.[104]

In the first century BC Armenia was a land with a very substantial military potential. An exceptional situation occurred in 69 BC, during the reign of Tigranes II (ca. 96-55 BC), at the Battle of Tigranokerta. An enormous multinational army commanded by Tigranes II, king of Armenia, engaged in battle against the Romans. However, it included forces from kingdoms allied with Armenia. Plutarch (*Luc*. 26.4) lists Armenians, Gordyeni, (Atropatenian) Medes, Adiabeni, Arabs from "the sea of Babylonia," Albanians from the Caspian Sea, Iberians, and "not a few of the peoples about the River Araxes, who are not subject to kings, had been induced by favours and gifts to come and join him." According to Plutarch (*Luc*. 26.6) Tigranes' army consisted of 20,000 bowmen and slingers, 55,000 cavalry including 17,000 cataphracts, "as Lucullus said in his letter to the Senate," and 150,000 infantry. The total of 225,000 seems to be inflated for an offensive force, but the human military resources of the coalition gathered by Tigranes could have reached this figure.[105] Lucullus had an interest in inflating the number of defeated enemies to make his victory an exceptional and unparalleled achievement. It seems that the numbers recorded by Plutarch refer not to a field army but to the military mobilisation strength of the peoples united in Tigranes' coalition. Thus, Atropatene and Armenia could provide more

[103] For the history of post-Achaemenid and Arsakid Armenia, see Chaumont (1976), (1987); Wolski (1983).

[104] Armenia versus Parthia: Chaumont (1976) 71-194, (1987) 418-438, (1985-1988) 13-25; Olbrycht (2013) *passim*.

[105] Appian (*Mithr*. 85) gives 250,000 foot and 50,000 horse for Tigranes' army, which is clearly an exaggeration.

than 100,000 soldiers together, the Albanians (with their Sarmatian allies from the northern Caucasus)[106] more than 80,000, and the Iberian potential was probably similar to that of Armenia. The forces of Adiabene, Gordyene and the Arabs of Mesopotamia, each several thousand soldiers, should be added to this.

Despite having large numbers (or maybe because of having collected such a vast army), Tigranes was utterly defeated, due to a lack of coordination and his own and his chief of staff's failure to command so great an army properly. The Romans, who were outnumbered many times over, scored a brilliant victory. In 68 BC, after the Battle of Tigranokerta, Mithradates and Tigranes formed a new army from the Armenian population, totalling 70,000 infantrymen and 35,000 cavalry (App. *Mithr*. 87). Appian (*Mithr*. 87) stresses that Mithradates "enrolled almost the whole population of Armenia" and from these he "selected the bravest." The cited figure of 105,000 must have pertained to universal male conscription, not to the standard mobilisation strength in Armenia (ca. 46,000), including not only experienced soldiers but also a high rate of untrained supernumeraries (probably half of the total). This is why most of the latter were disbanded, to achieve a total of 70,000: Phlegon of Tralles (*FrGrHist* 257 F12) states that Tigranes and Mithradates combined a force of 40,000 infantry and 30,000 cavalry, arranged it in the 'Italian fashion' and went to war against Lucullus, but were utterly defeated. 5,000 of those with Tigranes fell, and more were taken captive. This account refers apparently to the fighting in 68 BC, following the battle of Tigranokerta.

Armenia had a reputation for its excellent cavalry.[107] Strabo (11.14.9) emphasises Armenia's wealth and remarks that it was "very good for horse-pasturing, not inferior even to Media." Contrary to the prevalent notion, Armenia was not only a mountainous region, it also had vast pasturelands, particularly around Lake Sevan. Its horse-breeding tradition went back to Urartu times, though later the Achaemenid kings received 20,000 foals from the satrap of Armenia every year "at the time of the Mithrakina" (Strab. 11.14.9). We have information on the horsemanship of the Urartians in the famous letter of the Assyrian king Sargon II describing his campaign of 714 BC.[108] On the basis of this testimony we can say that the Urartians profited from the cavalry and horsemanship

[106] For the Sarmatian tribes of the Northern Caucasus, see Olbrycht (2001).

[107] Armenian cavalry under Artavasdes II (55-34 BC): Plut. *Ant*.50.4; 52.2-3; Plut. *Crass*. 19.1; Strab. 11.4.9; 11.4.4.

[108] Dalley (1985) 42.

skills of their neighbours in Mannaea, an area in north-western Iran, later the central part of Media Atropatene.[109] In the eighth century BC, a Urartian king mustered a force of 106 chariots, 22,704 infantrymen, and 9,374 riders for a campaign against Mannaea.[110] Thus the predecessors of the Armenians were able to raise a powerful cavalry division of almost 10,000 men, and more than 22,000 infantry.

In 53 BC Artavasdes II, King of Armenia, had 16,000 horsemen and 30,000 foot soldiers at his disposal, apparently with 10,000 cataphracts in the cavalry — extraordinary numbers for such an expensive type of mounted unit. 6,000 cavalrymen made up his bodyguard (Plut. *Crass*. 19.1). Thus Armenia could furnish 46,000 soldiers, apparently as its standard force ready for action, and Artavasdes II fully deserved the epithet of "the greatest among the minor kings" (Plut. *Ant*. 37). In 36 BC Artavasdes II furnished an army of 6,000 cavalrymen (cataphracts "apart from the rest of his cavalry") and 7,000 infantrymen for Antony. There is no doubt that it was only an expeditionary force, and not the whole of Armenia's military resources (Plut. *Crass*. 19.1; Strab. 11.14.9).

In several passages Moses Khorenatsi attests the standard mobilisation strength of Armenia at ca. 42,000-45,000 soldiers. His history is full of legendary motifs, but his figures for the military seem to be reliable in most cases, as they are drawn from good primary sources, although often embedded in a legendary or semi-legendary context. Moses' data coincide with the evidence of Strabo, based on reliable sources for the Mithradates VI's and Roman campaigns in Western Asia. Moses ascribes the semi-legendary king Aram of Armenia an army of 40,000 infantry and 5,000 (or 2,000) cavalry (MX 1.14). Similar data are already provided by classical sources for Achaemenid Armenia; at Issos (333 BC) Armenia mustered 40,000 infantry and 7,000 cavalry (Curt. 3.2.6). A similar mobilisation strength is attested for late Artaxiad Armenia in the first century BC (Plut. *Crass*. 19.1: 46,000). Moses claims that the Parthian king Valarshak (Vałaršak, a ruler mirroring the historical Vologases I) "established four companies of palace guards, each one with ten thousand armed men from the same ancient race of kings descended from our ancestor Hayk," (MX 2.7)[111] giving a total of 40,000 men for the Armenian army.

[109] Drews (2004) 66-67.
[110] Drews (2004) 109.
[111] Transl. Thomson (1996).

In the first century BC Armenia's potential was around 46,000 men, almost on a par with Media Atropatene. The figure for Armenia (Plut. *Crass*. 19.1) is probably not inclusive of Gordyene and Sophene, historically territories associated with Armenia but often passed over in the ancient accounts of the region. Armenia had large reserves and was able to muster more than 40-50,000 soldiers. An Armenian army of 40,000 men was defeated by the Sasanians troops under Ardashir I. Some of the soldiers fled to their king and together with fresh recruits formed another army of 30,000 men that defeated the Sasanian troops (P'awstos Buzand, *Epic Histories* 3.8). The Armenian Military Register lists about 60,000 cavalry in Armenia in the late Sasanian period.[112]

Media Atropatene

North-western Iran, called Media Atropatene in antiquity, and later Azerbaijan, was inhabited predominantly by the Iranian Medes (with an influx of steppe Cimmerians and Scythians in the late eighth and seventh centuries BC),[113] for whom horsemanship was of central importance. This is attested for Mannaea and a handful of Median principalities in the eighth–seventh centuries BC, when these regions were repeatedly invaded by Urartian and Assyrian kings — primarily for the country's excellent horses. The Assyrian armies largely depended on horses imported from Media, and their kings continued to collect "horse tributes" from north-western Iran.[114]

Media Atropatene is presented in the source records as a country comparable to Armenia — 50,000 soldiers (including 10,000 cavalry) in the first century BC (Strab. 11.13.1-3) — and this potential attracted the interest of the Roman commanders Lucullus, Pompey, and finally Antony. At this time, the Romans were attempting to subjugate Armenia and looking for allies among the dependent kings of Parthia. Strabo's evidence for Atropatene relies on a certain Apollonides, a historian of the Mithradatic period (*FHG* IV 309-310). No exact dates are known for Apollonides, but his account of Atropatene may be connected with the state of affairs in the 70s-60s BC, when Mithradates VI tried to gain the support of Tigranes and was keenly interested in the military potential of

[112] Toumanoff (1963) 238.
[113] Olbrycht (2000) 71-99.
[114] Details in Drews (2004) 86-120.

Armenia and the neighbouring countries, including the powerful state of Atropatene.[115]

The political status of Media Atropatene in the first century BC underwent a number of changes, but as of the mid-second century BC it had become an Arsakid dependency,[116] and in 35-33 BC, after a number of abortive attempts to gain independence following the war against Mark Antony, it remained part of the Parthian Empire. In 36 BC Mark Antony had to reckon with a total Parthian force of around 90,000. His army numbered about 100,000 men. Sixteen legions of 60,000 Romans and 10,000 cavalry from Spain and Gaul made up the kernel of his army. The allied kings provided about 30,000 soldiers, mostly horsemen, including about 13,000 Armenians.[117] During the war, Artavasdes of Armenia withdrew his corps. A comparison of Parthian and Roman forces reveals that the Arsakid army (90,000) was almost equal to its Roman counterpart in terms of numbers. From a strategic perspective, this proportion implies that the Parthians were the superior force.[118]

The princes of Atropatene had an infantry, which proved its power during the defence of Phraaspa against Antony (36 BC), when the Atropatenians even managed to undertake victorious raids against the Roman forces and eventually ousted them. Part of the territory of Atropatene and Greater Media was mountainous, and was noted as the home of first-rate infantrymen, including javelineers. Atropatene bordered on the lands of the powerful Cadusii, who lived along the coast of the Caspian Sea. Strabo wrote of the Cadusii in connection with Antony's war in Atropatene (11.13.4), noting their military virtues as javelin throwers (*akontistai*). There are no precise data on the military strength of the Cadusii in the Parthian era.[119] The same applies to the Deylamites who inhabited the mountains south of the Caspian Sea.[120]

[115] See Olbrycht (2014) 13-28.

[116] Olbrycht (2010) 239-240.

[117] See Bivar (1983) 59.

[118] Traditionally, it is assumed that a defending force has a 3:1 advantage over an attacker. Thus the attacking force should furnish an army of at least three times the size of an enemy in terms of numbers. See Mearsheimer (1989) 54-89.

[119] On the Cadusii, see Syme (1988) 137-50.

[120] Polyb. 5.44.9; Plut. *Pomp*. 36.2 (often identified as the Elymaioi). In the Sasanian period the Deylamits fought in royal troops as allies and mercenaries, see Prok. *Bell*. 8.14.5-10, 12; Agath. 3.17.6-9.

The kingdoms of the southern Caucasus: Albania and Iberia

Another area within the Parthian sphere of interest was Albania, a neighbour of Atropatene and Armenia, controlling the important passage of Darband situated at the narrow passage linking Iran and the Sarmatian lands north of the Caucasus. At certain times, the country was a vassal kingdom of the Parthians; occasionally, the Albanians are mentioned in the sources as allies of the Arsakids.[121] Moses Khorenatsi (MX 2.8) claims that "the Parthian Valarshak made Aran governor with ten thousands [troops]," thereby attesting to a Parthian predominance under Vologases I (AD 51-79), whose historical achievements are ascribed to the semi-legendary Valarshak.[122]

The Albanians were heavily influenced by Iran, which explains their adoption of cataphracts. According to Strabo (11.4.4), the Albanians fought on foot and on horseback, both in light and in heavy armour, like the Armenians. Strabo gives a description of the Albanian army for the period of Pompey's invasion around 65 BC:

> They send forth a greater army than that of the Iberians; for they equip 60,000 infantry and 22,000 thousand horsemen, the number with which they risked their all against Pompey. The Albanians use javelins and bows; and they wear breastplates and large oblong shields, and helmets made of the skins of wild animals, similar to those worn by the Iberians.[123]

This army of over 80,000 men must have been augmented by north Caucasian nomads:

> Against outsiders the nomads join with the Albanians in war, just as they do with the Iberians, and for the same reason; and besides, they often attack the people, and consequently prevent them from farming" (Strabo 11.4.5).

Facing the Roman invasion, the Albanians mustered an army of 40,000 men and attacked the Roman forces led by Pompey. The Romans defeated these troops (Plut. *Pomp*. 34). When the Albanians revolted

[121] For Albania see Bais (2001); Mamedova (1986); Olbrycht (2007).

[122] See Mamedova (1986) 171. An Arsakid branch ruled over Albania from the third century AD. It is possible that Arsakid princes began to rule Albania in the late first century AD.

[123] Strab. 11.4.5 (transl. by H.L. Jones). Plutarch (*Pomp*. 35) ascribes 12,000 cavalry to the Albanians. This number probably relates to the forces of Albania proper, whereas the figure of 22,000 includes the nomadic auxiliaries.

against Pompey, they mustered 60,000 foot and 12,000 horse, "but wretchedly armed, and clad for the most part in the skins of wild beasts" (Plut. *Pomp*. 35). Albania could therefore muster a considerable army, but a large part of it was not battle-worthy. Pompey's troops had no problem with vanquishing the Albanians. It seems that in the 1st century BC the standard mobilisation strength of the trained Albanian soldiers without their nomadic allies and probably ill-trained recruits conscripted in the face of the Roman invasion, should be estimated at half of the figure mentioned by Strabo, i.e. about 40,000-41,000 men. This number is close to the standard mobilisation strength of Armenia and Iberia.

On many occasions, the armed forces of Iberia made a significant contribution to the fighting between Parthia and Rome.[124] The Iberians were the traditional rivals of Armenia, and were antagonistic toward the Albanians. Unfortunately, Strabo does not give us precise data relating to the Iberian military forces, though he does mention that the Iberian dress was influenced by the Armenians and Medes points to Iberian connections with the Scythians and Sarmatians: "The Iberians assemble many tens of thousands, both from their own people and from the Scythians and Sarmatians, whenever anything alarming occurs" (Strabo 11.3.3). Plutarch (*Pomp*. 34.5) states that Pompey routed the Iberian army in a great battle (65 BC), "in which nine thousand of them were slain and more than ten thousand taken prisoner."

Pompey's victory was overwhelming, but the Iberians fought in their own country and knew the lay of the land and natural conditions. Moreover, as Dio 37.1-2 shows, the Iberian king Artokes and a number of soldiers were able to flee to the forests and the mountains.[125] Under such circumstances we may assume that the Iberian casualties, although very high, were less than half of their entire army. This implies that the Iberians could mobilize 40,000 men. Such an estimate is confirmed elsewhere: Plutarch (*Pomp*. 34.4) claims that the Iberians were "not less numerous than the others and more warlike." The nearest rival of any consequence to Iberia was neighbouring Armenia, which could mobilize 46,000 soldiers, while the Albanians could muster a comparable number at 40,000-43,000. As a result, the mobilisation strength of Iberia may be

[124] On Iberia, see Gagoshidze (2007) 20-32, (2008) 1-40; Rapp (2014).

[125] In antiquity the number of casualties was usually quite low (under 5%). See Krentz (1985). They rose significantly, however, after the formation was broken and the soldiers retreated.

estimated at a level slightly lower than that of Armenia, i.e. about 40,000 soldiers.

An account from the Georgian chronicle *K'art'lis c'xovreba* shows that Amazaspes II of Iberia (ruled in the second century AD) mustered on one occasion 10,000 horse and 30,000 infantrymen.[126] This is clearly the size of a regular Iberian army in Arsakid times.[127]

Other regna minora*, peoples, and neighbouring kingdoms*

Each of the Arsakid vassal kingdoms had its own armed forces. Around AD 52–53 Adiabene had about 6,000 cavalrymen, which it used against Vologases I (Ios. *Ant*. 20.82). Probably we should add some infantry battalions to this figure, for Adiabene was a fairly urbanised kingdom ready to defend its cities like Arbela, Ashur, or Nineveh.[128] The total for Adiabene's armed forces would have numbered about 10,000 soldiers. Other places with a significant infantry included Hatra, Edessa, and Atropatene, all of them kingdoms near Adiabene.

The Arabian kingdom of Osrhoene in northern Mesopotamia had an army of several thousand men. In AD 115 Abgar VII provided horses, 250 cataphracts, armour for horses and riders, and 60,000 arrows as gifts for Trajan (Arr. *Parth*. frg. 47). During the wars between Parthia and Rome in the first century BC – first century AD the princes of Edessa were forced to support one of the belligerents, usually the Parthians.[129]

There were also warlike kingdoms and peoples on the territory of Parthian Iran proper whose military potential is not precisely known. One of these peoples were the Kossaians/Cossaeans, who neighboured Media and Elymais. The warlike Kossaians did not have a kingdom of their own, but had a large army composed primarily of archers.[130] According

[126] *K'art'lis c'xovreba*: Leonti Mroveli, p. 36. See Toumanoff (1963) 239 n. 312. When Artokes of Iberia and Oroizes of Albania fought Pompey, they placed 70,000 soldiers in an ambush for Pompey (App. *Mithr*. 103). Apparently, both sides furnished the armies of 35,000 men.

[127] The Iberian recruiting potential doubled this number, to which one can add auxiliary and allied troops of north Caucasian nomads. Vaxtang I of Iberia was able to muster 100,000 horse and 60,000 foot in late Sasanian times (*K'art'lis c'xovreba*: Juanšer, p. 79).

[128] For Adiabene's history, see Marciak (2011).

[129] Plut. *Crass*. 21.1-4; 22.1.3-5; 28.5-7; Dio 40.20.1-21.1; 40.22.1; 40.23.1-2; Tac. *Ann*. 6.44.5; 12.12.2; 12.12.3; 12.14.1.

[130] Strab. 11.13.6, 16.1.18; Diod. 17.59.3, 17.111.4; Arr. *an*. 7.15.1, 23.1. They fought in the left wing of the army of Darius III at Gaugamela (Diod. 17.59.3; cf. Curt. 4.12.10).

to Strabo, at some uncertain date 13,000 Kossaian bowmen joined the Elymaians in a war against the Susians and the Babylonians (11.13.6, 16.1.18). This account probably relates to an episode in the late second or early first century BC. At this time, Susiana and Elymais were separate territorial units, as evidenced in Strabo (Susiana: 15.3.2-13).[131]

In 124 BC, an Elymaian army invaded Parthian Babylonia but was defeated. In a letter to the governor (*pāḫātu*) of Babylon and the *politai* of the city, the Parthian king describes his victory over the Elymaian king Pittit and his army of 15,000 soldiers.[132] Thus the military strength of Elymais and the neighbouring Kossaians appears to be similar. A similar or slightly smaller mobilisation strength may be ascribed to Susiana, a rich country between Sittakene and Elymais.

Persis in the Arsakid era presents a special case. There is not much information on the history of this country in the Arsakid period. We know of its kings and princes from their coinage, and there is considerable evidence that Persis was a vassal state of the Arsakids. However, there are no concrete data on its army nor its contribution to Arsakid military ventures.[133] Strabo (15.3.18) stresses that the Persians served in the army and held commands from twenty to fifty years of age, both as foot-soldiers and as horsemen. This account pertains to the Achaemenid period,[134] but it would seem that there had been no substantial change in its military organisation throughout the post-Achaemenid (Hellenistic) and Arsakid periods. Traditionally, Persis had well-trained corps of infantry (including the warriors of the mountains tribes like the Uxioi or Mardoi) alongside the cavalry.

The standard mobilisation strength of this large and populous country was about 120,000 in the fourth century BC. Presumably, it had a similar, if not a larger, number of men serving in the military in the Arsakid epoch. By analogy with other countries of Western Asia, such as Armenia or Media, whose manpower in Arsakid times was not lesser that in the late Achaemenid period, Arsakid Persis was probably able to furnish no less soldiers that under the Achemenids. Incidentally, the same figure of 120,000 also occurs in the reign of Ardashir I (226-242). According to the *Historia Augusta*, the Roman Emperor Severus Alexander defeated a Persian army of 120,000 cavalrymen, including 10,000 cataphracts

[131] For Elymais and Susiana, see Hansman (1998) 373-376.
[132] *Astronomical Diaries* 3-124B: 'rev.' 17'-18'; Boiy (2004) 178.
[133] For Persis in Arsakid times see Wiesehöfer (1999) 333–337, (2007) 37–49.
[134] Biffi (2005) 297-298. See Hdt. 1.136.2; 1.209.2; Xen. *An.* 1.2.12; 13.3.1.

(*cataphractarii* / *clibanarii*) (HA *Sev*. *Alex*. 56.5). The figure of 120,000 does not seem to have been put into the HA by chance. This must represent the Roman estimate of the mobilisation strength of Ardashir's forces in the Mesopotamian theatre of war or the mobilisation strength of Persis alone. We have to bear in mind that not only the army of Persis, but also the forces of the other lands that Ardashir I ruled must have taken part in the war against the Romans. However, we shall leave Persis out of our calculation of the manpower for the Arsakid period, since we do not have any reliable information on this kingdom's contribution to the military forces of Parthian kings. One can speculate that the figure of 120,000 men as the standard mobilisation strength signifies that the Persians were able to muster a vassal contingent comparable in size to Atropatene or Media; that is up to 50,000 men.

Parthian mobilisation strength: conclusion

The largest field army that the Arsakids are known to have had for a military campaign — Phraates IV's striking force in his war against the Romans under Antony — numbered 50,000 men. In point of fact, we should speak of at least 90,000 men engaged on the Parthian side, if we count the infantry and cavalry active in the Atropatenian theatre of war. Phraates IV commanded an army of 50,000 cavalry, apparently including 10,000 Atropatenian horsemen. This number should be extended to include the Atropatenian infantry corps totalling 40,000 men, charged with defending the country against the Roman invasion.[135] At the same time, there must have been soldiers still manning the garrisons along Parthia's other borders, such as those in Babylonia and Margiana. Yet, Phraates IV's army constituted a huge and highly efficient military power, only rarely matched for its size by the Romans. While on the subject of large numbers, we would do well to remember that Vologases I offered 40,000 mounted archers (*hippotoxotai*) to Vespasian around AD 69 (Tac. *Hist*. 4.51.1; Suet. *Div*. *Vesp*. 6.4). If Vologases was ready to send such a huge force to Rome, we may be sure that his army numbered at least another 40,000 archers, not counting cataphracts and

[135] Incidentally, this is the standard mobilisation strength of the Atropatenian infantry. The actual figures of Atropatenian footmen may have been even higher in 36 BC, taking into account the extraordinary danger of the destruction of the capital and the entire country, which may have caused a greater mobilisation of armed forces than usual.

infantry (at least several tens of thousands, conceivably a minimum of another 40,000). Thus we obtain an estimate for his total land forces at a minimum of 120,000 men. This figure matches the number given for the army of Vologases IV mustered against the rebellious Persians and Medes.

In this connection, it is worthwhile to examine some aspects of Arsakid political strategy. The Arsakids controlled Atropatene ever since Mithradates I (ca. 165-132 BC) with only occasional short intervals. In addition, they strove to control Armenia, first as a dependent state, then later beginning with Artabanos II by incorporating the country by installing an Arsakid on the throne. Vologases (AD 51-79) accomplished this plan, making his brother Tiridates king of Armenia. Pakoros, another of his brothers, reigned in Atropatene. Thereby the Arsakid royal domain was enlarged under Vologases I with the addition of two large kingdoms, Atropatene and Armenia, generating a mighty concentration of military power and giving the emperors of Rome cause for concern. The mobilisation strength of the Arsakid royal domain had been about 200,000 men even before the reign of Vologases I, and it must have gone up by another 45,000 (in round figures) when the Arsakids took firm control of Armenia under Vologases I and Pakoros II. One should add to this total the forces of Media Atropatene (50,000). There is no evidence that these numbers fluctuated much in the first century AD when the Indo-Parthians and Sakastan seceded, and rebellion broke out in Hyrcania. Under Vologases I (after AD 66) and Pakoros II the mobilisation strength amounted to about 275,000 men when taking into account the Royal domain (180,000) and Atropatene as well as Armenia (95,000 in round figures). Even if Armenia remained largely under Roman hegemony in the second – early third centuries AD, we may safely conclude that the Arsakids had a military potential of over 275,000 soldiers (at least from the first century BC onward) plus guards and garrisons (about 20,000). This does not imply, however, that all 295,000 men would have ever been employed in a single campaign, rather the Arsakids had at their disposal various units and formations, including those in a standing army, ready to be called upon whenever the need happened to arise. This mobilisation strength mirrors the size of the Arsakid armed forces in a defensive stance, including the royal forces, Parthian national army, garrisons, and mercenaries. As a number of units were not suitable for offensive operations, one may assume that the power of an offensive army might not have exceeded half of the total figure, i.e. about

140,000-150,000. It is slightly more than the figure of 120,000 soldiers, which appears as the total for the largest of Arsakid armies. These figures do not include the numbers raised by vassal kingdoms, like Charakene, Adiabene or Persis (the latter had probably a mobilisation strength comparable to that in Achaemenid times).

The communis opinio claims that the Parthians usually had a much smaller army than Rome. One of their critics writes, "Although it could field large armies, Parthia maintained no forces remotely comparable to Rome's."[136] There can be no denying that Rome had a large number of well-trained professional soldiers. In general, the armed forces of Rome were larger, and its standing army was much greater than the Parthian forces, but they were arranged over three continents. What mattered with Iran was what kind of force Rome could deploy in war in Western Asia. The Parthians could not afford to set their entire military resources against Rome, since they, too, had other borders to safeguard — Bactria, the Persian Gulf, and the Caucasus region.[137]

In the first century BC or first century AD, Rome did not have the upper hand over the Parthians in Western Asia in terms of numerical strength. The Arsakids were able to muster vast defensive forces, for instance an army of at least 90,000 men against Mark Antony's invading army of 100,000. The troops which could be called up only from the Arsakid royal domain could easily create a striking force of over 100,000 soldiers in the first century BC –first century AD, while in defense of Crown Lands the Arsakids could furnish more than 295,000 soldiers (including contingents from Atropatene). Moreover, if we include forces from vassal states like Persis as well as mercenaries and allies (e.g., from Albania, Kommagene or in some cases Iberia), then the Parthian army could easily have been enlarged by as many as 100,000 men.

The Roman forces sent into action against the Parthians in the Parthian–Roman theatre of war usually did not exceed 50,000 men (Crassus' army). After Crassus' abortive expedition, the Romans paid more attention to the size of their armies. That is why Caesar prepared an army of 16 legions and 10,000 cavalry for a Parthian war in 44 BC.[138] It also explains the reason that Antony mobilised more than 100,000 soldiers, even though he still lost. Rome's next attempt at a frontal attack

[136] Kennedy (1996) 86.
[137] On the distant frontiers of Parthia, see Wolski (1980).
[138] Goldsworthy (2006) 491.

against Parthia came with Trajan's invasion, which was conducted with an army of as many as 80,000.[139] Thanks to the civil war in Parthia, this Roman force was victorious at first, but eventually it was repelled and forced to retreat.

In a theatre of war spanning the Levant, Mesopotamia, Anatolia, and Transcaucasia, there was an effective balance of power between the forces of Rome and Parthia. In the first century BC and first century AD, whenever the Romans mobilised, as they did under Antony, the Parthians put up analogous numbers of troops. Vologases I's victory in the war against Nero seems to have been the result of the temporary superiority of a united Parthia over the Roman military potential in Asia.

An exceptionally high concentration of troops under Marcus Aurelius and Septimius Severus helped the Romans win military successes and subjugate the northern part of Mesopotamia (Osrhoene and Nisibis), and Dura Europos. But we should also note the disasters Rome sustained at Hatra under Trajan and Severus. In the last confrontation between Rome and Parthia in AD 217-218 Artabanos IV, who had amassed a large army, carried a brilliant victory. Not surprisingly, the Romans continued to have a high regard for Parthian power until the end of the Arsakid period (Herodian. 4.10.1-5).[140]

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[139] Bennett (2005) 196.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Agathangelos	Thomson (1976).
ANRW	H. TEMPORINI & W. HAASE (eds.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, Berlin 1972–.
Edelstein & Kidd	L. EDELSTEIN AND I.G. KIDD (eds.), *Posidonius*. Vol. 1. *The Fragments*, Cambridge 1989; Vol. 2. *The Commentary*, Cambridge 1989; Vol. 3. *The Translation of the Fragments*, Cambridge 1999.
EncIr	*Encyclopædia Iranica*, ed. by E. Yarshater, Costa Mesa, New York [online: www.iranicaonline.org].
MX	Moses Khorenats'i = Thomson (2006).
P'awstos Buzand	Garsoïan (1989).

SEG	*Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*.
Sebeos	Thomson (1999).
ŠKZ	Shapur I's inscription, Ka'ba-ye Zardosht = Huyse (1999).
Ṭabarī	Ṭabarī, Ta'rīkh al-Rusul wa 'l-Mulūk (Annales), edited by M.J. de Goeje, Leiden 1879-1901.