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Was There No Paid Standing Army?
A Fresh Look on Military and Political Institutions in the Arsacid Empire

„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 a paid, standing army and mercenaries."

Herodian 3.1.2

If we attempt to understand the complex phenomena of cultural transfer in the art of warfare, archaeological material remains are one aspect and an important source to look at. But we also have to consider the circumstances and reasons why certain arms and armours became employed at specific times. The use of specific types of weaponry and particular kinds of troops is connected with both categories of warfare: (a) tactics and (b) strategy. Tactics, i.e., the deployment of troops and the action on the battlefield itself, depend on the kind of troops available. Strategy, i.e., the general planning and executing of military campaigns, is closely connected to the aims of war and the organization of the army (military strategy). These in turn are linked to state policy (political strategy) and to social organization.[1]

According to common opinion, the Arsacid Empire seems to be a case in point as social and military organization are considered as strongly intertwined. Following Josef Wolski, this is the result of the nomadic descent and heritage of the Arsacids which form the keys to understanding the empire's social and military structure.

> „Neben dem Königtum steht der Adel - die Nachkommen der Gefährten des Arsakes -, dem aber die Herrscher keine Macht einzuräumen gewillt sind. Als Gefährten des Königs erhielten sie für ihre Kriegsdienste reichen Lohn in Gestalt von Landschenkungen, denn

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[1] FERGUSON (1990) 26: „War is not merely action, [...] it is a condition of and between societies, with innumerable correlates in virtually every dimension of culture".

in dieser Zeit ist wahrscheinlich der enorme Reichtum einiger parthischer Familien ent-
standen, die bis in die Sasanidenzeit nachweisbar sind."[2]

Once Arsacid rule was established and further conquest was stopped in the early first cen-
tury BC, the Parnien/Parthian nobility, which had been compensated by huge tracks of land
including the people working the fields, came into conflict with the Arsacid king. Following
Wolski, it was generally accepted that starting with a mutiny against Mithridates II in the
early first century BC, permanent conflict ensued in the Arsacid Empire for more than 300
years, the longer part of its history. Based on the power of disposition over their peasant
dependents, minor nobles, small farmers and farm-workers, which also had to serve as
troops in case of war, the nobility opposed the King of Kings[3]. Accordingly, the King of
Kings and his might were seen as increasingly degenerating into a merely nominal ruler-
ship.[4] This description was bolstered by Islamic period sources who presented the Arsacid
period as one of „the many kings".

An argument central to this interpretation of Parthian history is the passage quoted at the
beginning in which Herodian (3.1.2) reports that the Parthian King of Kings had no stand-
ing army. For Jozéf Wolski, followed by many others, the absence of a standing army was
the obvious indication of a complete loss of control by a weak king who entirely depended
on his nobles[5]. The idea of the King of King as a „weak king" only nominally governing his
subject kings, nobles and the empire in general became the common concept of modern
interpretations of the Arsacid Empire and its history. In the words of Edward Keall „the
grandiose title 'King of Kings' used by the late Parthian monarchs was more of a publicity
pitch than a political reality"; the „Parthians can be judged to be imperial lightweights"
and „might be called the political clowns of the milledium"[6].

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[2] WOLSKI (1964) 382; WOLSKI (1981) 112; followed by OLBRYCHT (2003) 98-99 „Essentially the aristocracy
    of the victorious Aparni became the ruling elite in Parthia".

[3] WOLSKI (1965) 106-107: the murder of Mithridates II by Orobazes and of Surenas by Orodes II in the
    mid first century BC opened hostilities. „Derénevant, et jusqu'à la fin de la monarchie des Arsacides, son
    histoire se composera d'une série de meurtres, de complots, de rebellions interrompue ça et là par de rares
    victoires." A major role in the process is ascribed to a council of nobles which for Wolski formed part of
    the nomadic heritage, cf. WOLSKI (1965) 105-106; WOLSKI (1989) 224. KOSHELENKO/PILIPKO (1994)
    145 ascribe „considerable influence" to the council consisting largely of kinsmen of the king. For a rebut-
    tal of the council's influence see HAUSER (2005) 187-192.

[4] A more balanced view is taken by ZIEGLER (1964) 136 and SCHIPPMANN (1980) 74-5 who correctly point
    to the high esteem in which the Parthian Empire and its ruler were held by the Romans until the bird end.

[5] WOLSKI (1965) 114: „Le roi parthe de l'époque précédent la chute de l'État n'avait, d'après Hérodien
    [III.1.2], aucune troupe à sa disposition. C'étaient les gouverneurs de provinces qui, en cas de guerre,
    convoquaient la levée en masse de leur provinces et c'étaient eux qui en détenaient le commandement.
    Ces troupes, composées en majeure partie de petits propriétaires ruraux étaient complètement dépendan-
    tes de l'aristocratie et l'influence du roi y était presque nulle." KENNEDY (1977) 530 believes „Parthia was
    organized on a fundamentally different basis from the Roman Empire. Without a standing army, it was
    left to would-be mercenaries to join a noble or to seek a living where pay was offered." Cf. WOLSKI
    (1989) 225; KOSHELENKO/PILIPKO (1994) 133-136.

[6] KEALL (1994) 254-6.

A more careful reading of Herodian's crucial passage, nevertheless, suggests a different interpretation of this important text. According to Herodian, the King of Kings did not appeal[7] to his satraps, but commanded them to provide troops. Thus, despite the absence of a standing royal army, the story reports on the power the King of Kings wielded, not on his weakness. This observation is of genuine importance as the organization and control of the army plays such a pivotal role for modern judgements on the Arsacid King of Kings and the empire in general. In order to elucidate the relation between the King of Kings, his nobles and the army, this article discusses (I) the character of the armed forces, (II) the role of nobles in the organization of the military, and (III) the weakness or strength of the King of Kings. Finally, drawing on the conclusions reached some ideas (IV) on the organization of the Arsacid army are put forward.

I. The Armed Forces of the Arsacid Empire

„He [the emperor Antoninus (Caracalla)] wrote to the Parthian king Artabanus [...] The two most powerful empires were those of the Romans and the Parthians. If they were united by marriage, he would create one invincible power no longer separated by a river. For [...] the Romans had an infantry force which was invincible in close-quarter fighting (and) with spears, while the Parthians had a large cavalry force and highly skilled archery."

Herodian 4.10.1-5

Information on the Arsacid army comes mainly from Roman sources which univocally acknowledge the large mobility of its huge cavalry forces[8]. The smaller part of the cavalry consisted of the famous iron clad heavy armoured troops, the so-called *catafracti* and *clibanarii* who attracted considerable interest in modern literature[9]. Even more dangerous for Roman eyes were the numerous highly skilled mounted archers who shot their arrows in pursuit and flight alike (Plutarch, Crassus 24.3-27.1; Tacitus, Annales 6.35.2). The famous Parthian shot, i.e., firing an arrow backwards while seemingly in flight, became a common motive in East Roman terracottas as well as a topos in Roman literature and even in modern English[10]. Despite Tacitus' and Plutarch's statements that the army's strength lay solely

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[7] SHAHBAZI (1987) 494.

[8] For summary descriptions see SCHIPPMANN (1980), 93-4; SHAHBAZI (1987).

[9] In his careful discussion MIELCZAREK (1993), 10, 50 argued that the difference between the two groups lies in tactics employed and not in the arms. According to him, a *cataphractus* was „a spearman fighting in serried ranks of similar warriors: a rider fighting in an order which may be called the column order". In contrast, the *clibanarii* worked closely together with archers, a tactic „similar to the fighting principle adopted by medieval cavalry armed with pikes [...] more similar to the medieval wedge-like order than to the column array, when both units formed separate groups." Thus, the two terms could even be employed to denote the same people in two different fighting orders or tactics.

[10] The motif is repeatedly used by OVID, VERGIL, PROPERZ and HORAZ, cf. WISSEMANN (1982). On Parthians in Roman art see Schneider (1998); an example for the Parthian shot on terracottas is given by

in cavalry[11], we also know of huge armies of infantry, archers and other soldiers on foot[12], as well as of camel riders with long lances, probably contingents from the westernmost provinces or even nomadic allies[13].

The undisputed importance of cavalry forces to the army led scholars to believe that this was part of and indication for the supposed nomadic pastoralist heritage of the Parthians[14]. The idea was based on the correct ancient and modern observation of the high mobility of nomadic people[15]. Nevertheless, the idea of the Arsacid army as a basically traditional nomadic force has to be challenged for various reasons.

(I) First of all, it is noticeable that cavalry, cataphracts, as well as mounted archers, had a much longer tradition in the entire Parthian realm. This applies not only to the steppes and the neighbouring areas with a fully or partly pastoral nomadic population, but also among the sedentary population in densely settled regions. Cavalry troops are well attested all over the Achaemenid Empire in the sixth to fourth century BC where they feature throughout lists of troops or descriptions of battles[16]. The importance of cavalry is obvious in descrip-

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WINKELMANN (2003) Abb. 7. For mounted archers in the western Arsacid Empire see von GALL (1990); VENCO RICCIARDI (1998).

[11] Cf. TACITUS, Annales 6.34: *Atque illis sola in equite vis*, 6.35: *cum Parthus sequi vel fugere pari arte suetus distrahet turmas, spatium ictibus quaereret*. Plutarch, Crassus 19.2.

[12] CASSIUS DIO 40.15.2: „The Parthians make no use of a shield, but their forces consist of mounted archers and pikesmen, mostly in full armour. Their infantry is small, made up of the weaker men, but even these are all archers." 20,000 infantrymen were reported against the Alanes in AD 136: Chronicle of Arbela 8 KAWERAU (1985) II, 27. The value and even the authenticity of this source has been hotly debated. For a short summary of the debate and the appropriate literature: WIESEHÖFER (1998), 428.

[13] E.g. HERODIAN 4.14.3.

[14] E.g. NIKONOROV (1995); OLBRYCHT (1998a) 36. 262; OLBRYCHT (2003). If we use the argument that the army of Surenas in the battle at Carrhae (53 BC) followed "nomadic traditions" because it was mostly cavalry, we are entangled in a circular argument. Proffering the argument, OLBRYCHT (1998a) 36 assumes a tradition ranging from mounted archers from nomadic tribes (probably Dahae) on the border to Sogdia who were fighting against Alexander in 329 BC and the Parthian troops. The argument is not entirely convincing as the mounted archers might also have belonged to the usual contingents of the Achaemenid satrap Spitamenes who led some regular forces which were only joined by 500 tribesmen.

[15] HERODOTUS 4.46.2-3 praises the Scythians „that they have contrived that no one who attacks them can escape, and no one can catch them if they do not want to be found. [3] For when men have no established cities or forts, but are all nomads and mounted archers, not living by tilling the soil but by raising cattle and carrying their dwellings on wagons, how can they not be invincible and unapproachable?" Thucydides, Peloponnesian War 2.96.1, describes the Thracian tribes as armed in the same manner as the Scythians as being all mounted archers.

[16] Among the many examples see the troops listed in the military review of Xerxes, HERODOTUS 7.61-100; cavalry is listed 7.84-87. „There are horsemen in these nations, but not all of them furnished cavalry. Only the following did so: the Persians, equipped like their infantry, except that some of them wore headgear of hammered bronze and iron." Additional cavalry was provided by the Sagartians, Medians, Cissians, Indians, Bactrians, „Caspians" (I), Libyans, „Caspians" (II), Paricanians, and Arabians on camels. HERODOTUS 7.184-187 concludes that there were 1,700,000 infantry, 517,610 men in the fleet and 80,000 cavalry plus 20,000 camel riders and charioteers. These numbers are of course grossly inflated. Cf. also HERODOTUS 8.113 where Xerxes after the loss at Salamis provides Mardonios with an elite army including plenty of cavalry. A later example is provided by the battle at Issus in 333 BC. CURTIUS RUFUS 3.3.8-16 reports

tions of Herodotus, Xenophon (Cyropaedia 5.3.24) and later authors like Nepos (Datames 8.2.), but also augmented in the Achaemenid king Dareios' inscription in Susa (Dsf) and his tomb inscription at Naqš-e Rostam[17]. Recently it was even argued that the real strength of the Persian army was the cavalry[18].

The Achaemenid cavalry carried either spears or javelins or mostly bows and arrows like most of the infantry. Mounted archers, the main force of the later Arsacid armies, are known for many of the ethnic contingencies of the Achaemenid army of 6th and 5th century BC by Herodotus (7.84; 9.49) and Xenophon (Anabasis 3.4.24). It is important to note that horsemen and cavalry were by no means restricted to nomadic people or areas of the empire[19]. Written sources attest them to various geographical areas. Especially for the most densely settled part of the empire, Babylonia, we possess comparatively detailed information. Here, parts of the country, mostly newly developed areas, i.e., watered by new canals, were organized in commonly-called ḫaṭru. This institution, probably with beginnings in neo-Babylonian times, but largely peculiar to the early Achaemenid Empire was an administrative entity organized according to military units. These ḫaṭru were divided into numerous tracts of land called bow estates (bīt qašti), horse estates (bīt sīsî) and chariot estates (bīt narkabti), pointing to the military background of these allotments of land[20] The idea is that land was allotted to soldiers to support themselves (and their families) who in turn had to fulfil largely military duties[21]. Some texts even detail the equipment the soldiers had to supply, e.g., „a horse with harness and reins, a šariam coat with neckpiece and hood, an iron

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that the numbers of cavalrymen from twelve nations (plus 10,000 cavalry men with javelins) were nearly as high as the number of infantrymen.

[17] „As a battle-fighter I am a good battle-fighter [...] As a horseman I am a good horseman. As a bowman I am a good bowman both afoot and on horseback. As a spearman I am a good spearman both afoot and on horseback." DNb, §8g-h, translation after BRIANT (1999) 112.

[18] BROSIUS (2005) 135.

[19] In his list of the various contingents of infantry in the Achaemenid army, HERODOTUS 7.61-80; mentions archers from twenty-three different ethnic groups. With the exception of the Assyrians, this list includes all people living in Central or Western Asia from India in the East to Ethiopia in the West. It is interesting that archers as part of the Assyrian army are well attested by neo-Assyrian reliefs. Only the people of Anatolia, Thracia and northern Africa appear devoid of archery. According to HERODOTUS 7.84, cavalry troops of the various peoples were usually armed like their respective infantry, i.e., not the least with bows, cf. also HERODOTUS 9.49. Some difficulty arises with the identification of the Caspian cavalry as it seems to appear twice in the list. HERODOTUS 7.86 „The Bactrians were armed like their infantry, the same for the Caspians." Another group called Caspians is listed in the next paragraph. The parallel description of the infantry in HERODOTUS 7.65 follows the same geographical order. Here the „Parthians, Chorasmians, Sogdians, Gandarians and Dadicer" are mentioned as armed „like the Bactrian" infantry. It seems likely that the Caspian cavalry mentioned together with the Bactrians in 7.86 should summarily denote those ethnic detachments described in HERODOTUS 7.65.

[20] STOLPER (1985) 70-104; JOANNÈS (1995) 1481-4; KLINKOTT (2005) 175-7. Increasingly soldiers turned to farming and preferred to pay the money necessary to rent and equip a soldier. Later large tracts of the land were acquired by entrepreneurs, cf. STOLPER (1985); BRIANT (2002) 597-9.

[21] Increasingly soldiers turned to farming and preferred to pay the money necessary to rent and equip a soldier. Later large tracts of the land were acquired by entrepreneurs, cf. STOLPER (1985); BRIANT (2002) 597-9.

armour with hood, a quiver, 120 arrows, some with heads, some without, a sword (?) with its scabbard, 2 iron spears"[22]. The prominent role of estates for members of the cavalry shows the extent to which these units were a regular part of Mesopotamian troops as early as the sixth century BC. The impact of these kinds of troops was even felt in the Peloponnesian War where Athens deployed mounted archers, albeit in small numbers (Thucydides, Pel. War 2.13.8; 5.84.1; 6.94.4).

Not only mounted archers, even heavy armoured cavalry, i.e., forerunners of the later cataphracti seem to be implied in Herodotus (Histories 7.84) and certainly by Xenophon (Anabasis 1.8, 2.5)[23]. Positively identified cataphracts are first attested in the battle of Panium between Antiochos III (the Great) and Scopas in 201 BC (Polybios, Histories 16.18) and again in 190 BC in the battle at Magnesia (Appian, The foreign wars, Syr. 6.32 - 6.34) and in 188 BC (Polybios, Histories 31.2.11). Cataphracts, therefore, had some history before they became famous in Roman sources as a formidable and terrifying force in the Arsacid army of the first century BC (Plutarch, Lucullus 27.6, 28.2-5; Plutarch, Crassus 19-25). Their aim was to attack the enemy, i.e. infantry, in close order and to break its lines.

The evidence for Seleucid cataphracts used in large numbers in the western part of the empire in military confrontations and parading at Daphne (Polybios, Histories 30.25) antedates the first mention of Parthian cataphracts by nearly 150 years.[24] Still, their invention is usually ascribed to the Parthians as the (nomadic) eastern power.[25] A Central Asian background for this force is supported by archaeological finds of armour. But the question is difficult to answer. Although Mielczarek believes that „only in the East could the Seleucids recognize the value of this heavy armoured cavalry", he convincingly argues that these troops were employed in perfect tactics against the Roman infantry in the early second century BC[26] This lends support to the assumption of some experience with these kinds of troops. We should, therefore, consider some additional argument. Cataphracti were a highly specialized unit. The supposed training needs of both men and horses in Cataphracti made them appear as full professionals. This afforded an economic situation most probably within a stratified society with a certain amount of division of labour not to be typically expected in nomadic pastoralist groups. According to Livy (37.40), Antiochus III placed

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22 Text UC 9/68 from Nippur dating 18 Tebet Darius year 2 (i.e. = 422 BC) translated by JOAN-NÈS/BEAULIEU, quoted after BRIANT (2002) 598.

23 MIELCZAREK (1993) 48. These troops probably fought in a wedge-like order, not like later cataphracts, and were therefore ineffective against a phalanx, cf. MIELCZAREK (1998) 103. Contrary to, e.g., RUBIN (1955), MIELCZAREK (1993) 15-6 carefully distinguishes between cataphracts and earlier heavy armoured horsemen which were nevertheless related. He also considers POLYBIOS 16.18 as „not precise enough to allow certainty in this matter", MIELCZAREK (1998) 101. For literature on archaeological remains of armours see MODE (2000).

24 MICHALAK (1987) 75.

25 MIELCZAREK (1998) 102: „In spite of the scarcity of evidence on the subject, it is difficult to doubt the eastern origin of Seleucid cataphracts."

26 MIELCZAREK (1998) 102-104.

3,000 cataphracts on each wing of his army at Magnesia. The high number makes it even more plausible to locate support for such a specialization in a sedentary environment.

In summary, whether the idea of cataphracts fighting infantry was of Central Asian origin or not, the incentive to use these units and the economic background to support these professionals in larger numbers can only be gained in a society producing a necessary surplus, i.e. a sedentary society. The Seleucids had already introduced people as far west as the Mediterranean Sea to the heavy armoured cavalry called cataphracts. Mounted archers were a far more common sight throughout the area of the later Parthian Empire (and beyond) centuries before Arsaces I overturned Seleucid rule and became the legendary founder of the Arsacid Empire. Albeit nomadic people might have preferred fighting on horseback, the long tradition of cavalry in the areas of sedentary people should caution us to identify cavalry as an indication for a specific or even solely nomadic background for Arsacid troops.

(2) Even if cavalry had been widely distributed before, we still have to account for the importance of cavalry under the Arsacids which was unprecedented in earlier imperial armies. The backbones of the Achaemenid and Seleucid armies were various forms of differently organized and variably armed infantry. But judging from the various reports on ancient battles and armies, the numbers of horsemen seem to have already been on the rise in the Seleucid period along with the ever diminishing importance of chariots which went out of use. What we observe in the Parthian period is, thus, not a completely new development, but rather the result of an ongoing change in tactics. It is important to note that the troops of choice, the combination of mounted archers and cataphracts, were exactly the right answer to the threats the Arsacid Empire faced. „On tactical considerations, too, only the cavalry could be useful to the Parthians, for the nomads of the east could easily break through any infantry that the Parthians were able to muster, while no Parthian infantry could have matched the Roman phalanxes on the western front".[27] Accordingly Mielczarek convincingly showed how the development and the ever wider deployment of heavy armoured cavalry in the Arsacid period was largely due to the advantages they provided in tactics against Hellenistic phalanxes, Roman infantry as well as against nomadic forces.[28]

This view is bolstered by the fact that infantry was by no means unknown, its usefulness was just on the decline and its importance diminished. Therefore, the heavy Arsacid reliance on a highly capable cavalry might bear some possible influence from nomads, but not necessarily so. The equation of horsemen with nomadic people or customs overlooks or disregards the long tradition of cavalry in sedentary contexts as well as the development and the reasons for the dramatic change of tactics.

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[27] SHABAZI (1987) 495.

[28] MIELCZAREK (1993) passim. OLBRYCHT (1998a) 75 n. 150.

(3) Independent of any discussion of the nomadic tradition in cavalry, the nomadic character of the Arsacids and the Parthian Empire in general is more than questionable[29]. In fact, the importance of cavalry and its tactics, sometimes explicitly compared to Scythian habits by Roman authors, served as one of the main arguments for the Arsacid nomadic heritage in modern scholarly work. But the case is much more complicated. In Roman literature (a) the relation to Scythians and (b) the supposed importance of riding horses in Parthian society were sometimes conventionally used to denote the difference between Romans and Parthians.[30] It would be misleading to take these statements at face value. According to Sonnabend, the „nearly tiring stereotypes" in the description of Parthians in Roman literature are an expression of a severe information deficit.[31] In this context it is important to note that Roman authors who describe Parthian archers and horsemen generally avoid any identification of riding with nomadism.[32] For the Romans the importance of horses clearly indicated „otherness", but it did not necessarily link the Parthians to a nomadic lifestyle. The bold connection is primarily a modern one based on the supposed nomadic background of the Arsacid dynasty.[33] For Roman authors the topos of riding served to express (in a somehow learned manner) the barbarian character and the power of the other world empire. „In other words, the Parthians were warriors and being Rome's neighbour, they, therefore, had to be reckoned with".[34]

The same doubts have to be cast on other supposedly nomadic traits in Arsacid society, i.e., the peripatetic court, the king as a hunter or conjectured family relations with Scythians. Stressing the nomadic component in Arsacid/Parthian heritage usually leads to negating the fact that from the mid-second century BC, the center of the empire shifted to the economically strongest and most populated area of the empire, central Mesopotamia. For centuries the court resided at Ctesiphon. Nevertheless, neither Mesopotamian settlements, nor the material culture, nor written sources suggest a break or any major deviation from former cultural development.[35] There are no indications of any additional nomadic impact on material culture or behaviour, and certainly no evidence for the transformation of the character of these societies based on large cities and agriculture. On the contrary, archaeological surveys have shown large scale irrigation projects and settlement systems in the wider area

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[29] A general critique of the topos of Arsacid/Parthian nomadism was formulated by BOYCE (1994). More recently, several authors from eastern Europe have stressed the nomadic heritage even more, cf. NIKONOROV (1995) and OLBRYCHT (1998a, 1998b, 1998c, 2003). See already KOSHELENKO (1980) 193-195. The argument is extensively discussed and refuted by HAUSER (2005) and not repeated here.

[30] Cf. SONNABEND (1986) 277-279.

[31] SONNABEND (1986) 198.

[32] WISSEMANN (1982); HAUSER (2005) 180 with n. 61.

[33] The beginning of Arsacid rule is highly problematic in itself. For discussions see numerous articles by Wolski summarized in WOLSKI (1993) 37-65; LERNER (1999) 13-31; critical NEUSNER (1965) and HAUSER (2005).

[34] DRIJVERS (1998) 287.

[35] Cf. INVERNIZZI (1994); Hauser (2000a).

including Khuzestan. Parallel developments have been observed in the northern parts of the former empire.[36] Instead of a strong nomadic component, archaeological and written sources have provided evidence for the administrative and economic incorporation of nomads on the fringes of the ecological and political frontiers of the Arsacid Empire.[37] Following this lead, we should rather ask how the supposed nomadic character of a small group of (Parthian or even Parnian) warriors should have survived for several hundred years within a largely urbanized sedentary environment?

(5) Lastly, the terror and the strength of mounted archers and the heavy armoured cataphrats witnessed by Roman sources, should not detract us from noticing the variety of troops and military installations tracible from the available sources. The 20,000 infantry against the Alanes in AD 136 have already been mentioned.[38] There are a number of walled cities attested either archaeologically like Hatra, by literary sources like Phra'ata (Plutarch, Anthony 38) or by both kinds of sources like Seleucia-on-the-Tigris. These had to be manned by fighters from within the city, but also by garrisons as mentioned by Plutarch[39]. In addition, there is strong evidence for castella, systems of fortifications and even long walls on various frontiers of the empire.[40] While a Parthian date for the various eastern defence walls, particularly in Gurgan, has long been assumed, castella detected in present day northern Iraq or Syria were generally held to be of Roman origin. Because of the negative image of Parthian rule, the first systematic fortification against Rome was ascribed to the Sasanians.[41] Dated inscriptions in Hatrean Aramaic at several castella in northern Iraq prove the existence of a number of fortresses built against the Romans at least by the middle of the second century AD.[42] The existence of Arsacid fortresses was also witnessed by Cassius Dio (79.26.3) who reports that among the Arsacid King of King's conditions for peace with Rome in AD 218 was the rebuilding of castella destroyed by Caracalla during his raids in AD 216. These short notes suffice to demonstrate that, despite the importance of cavalry troops, the Arsacid army was much more diversified. The question leads back to

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[36] E.g., LITVINSKIJ (1998); OLBRYCHT (1998a); RAPOPORT et. al. (2000).

[37] HAUSER (1998), repeated by SOMMER (2003) and SOMMER (2005). See also project D 7 of the Sonderforschungsbereich 586: www.nomadsed.de.

[38] Chronicle of Arbela 8 KAWERAU (1985) II, 27. In as much as the Armenian army is comparable we might quote PLUTARCH, CRASSUS 19.1 where Artabazes, king of Armenia, promised Crassus the support of 10,000 cavalry and 30,000 infantry men.

[39] PLUTARCH, ANTHONY 38: Anthony led his troops against the enemy to avoid that in spring „the Parthians should stir out of their homes and garrisons". OLBRYCHT (1998c) 139: „At major fortresses and cities, military garrisons were located."

[40] FRYE (1977) lists various defensive walls in Mesopotamia, towards the Caucasus, east of the Caspian Sea in Gurgan and one around the Merv Oasis against nomadic threats, but dates all of them to the Sasanian period. For a dating of the so-called Alexander-wall in the Gurgan to the Arsacid period see HUFF (1981); KIANI (1982a) and KIANI (1982b), cf. BADER et al. (1998) on the difficulties of dating these walls.

[41] KENNEDY und RILEY (1990) 33.

[42] HAUSER (1998) 517-9.

the argument on cavalry. As we have seen there is no need to draw on a nomadic background to account for the presence of mounted archers or of cataphracts. It is much more convincing to see the Parthian army as a further development of structures already in existence in a largely urban, sedentary environment. The unprecedented importance of cavalry is the result of the full incorporation and deployment of modern tactics.

II. The Role of Nobles in the Organization of the Military

„Parthian social structure was closely connected with the state's military organization, which for the most part was founded on nomadic practices inherited from the Aparni."

Olbrycht (2003) 99.

There is general agreement that the composition and organization of Arsacid troops was closely related if not identical to the social structure of the empire.[43] Accordingly, it is commonly assumed that troops were levied by the various kings, satraps or nobles among their subjects. Following Iustin (41.2.5), only a small portion of the army consisted of free men (*liberi*) while *maiorem partem servitiorum*, i.e., dependents. Among the supposedly 50,000 cavalry men who fought against Anthony in 36 BC only 400 were *liberi* as Iustin (41.2.6) points out. While this passage once more indicates the importance and huge numbers of cavalry troops, it also proves that horse-riders were by no means necessarily nobles.[44] On the contrary, Iustin states that the wealthier someone is the more cavalrymen he will provide for his king in case of war. The category of horse-riders (Greek: ἱππεῖς, Persian: asvā-rān) is, therefore, primarily a military and functional entity and not necessarily a social group. This is quite clear in Plutarch's report on Crassus' defeat at Carrhae in 53 BC in which he uses the term „riders" invariably for Parthian, Armenian or Roman cavalry in general. Nevertheless, Plutarch (Crassus 21.6) carefully distinguishes between the 1,000 heavy armed ἱππεῖς δὲ κατάφρακτοι and the unnumbered („many") lightly armed κοῦφοι Again, both are listed summarily as *hippeis*.[45] Among these riders, a socially advanced group

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[43] WOLSKI (1965) 107 argued that tensions with the nobles forced the King to hire mercenaries as early as the first century BC; rejected by WIDENGREN (1976) 286-7, who correctly discriminated between ethnic auxiliary troops and individual mercenaries, both with little impact in the Arsacid era.

[44] The idea was put forward by KOSHELENKO (1980) followed by OLBRYCHT (2003) 80 who also identified the *liberi* with cataphracts. The argument is based in IUSTIN's (41.3.4) claim that the „only clear difference between slaves (*servi*) and free men (*liberi*)" is that the latter travel invariably on horseback, the slaves on foot. It is uncertain how the *servi* in IUSTIN 41.3.4 relate to the riding *servitia* of IUSTIN 42.2.5. If both passages would report on the same people, IUSTIN's statements were contradictory. We should bear in mind that IUSTIN 41.3.4 is a very bold statement on the general disposition of the Parthians to constant riding ending with this pun line while 42.2.5 cites a specific event to illustrate that everybody was trained and fit to ride.

[45] PLUTARCH, CRASSUS 21.6: „Altogether he had, as horsemen ἱππεῖς, dependents (πελάται) and slaves (δοῦλοι) no less then 10,000 men". Cf. PLUTARCH, CRASSUS 17.4; 20.1; 23.4; 25.2; 25.7 about Crassus'

is formed by the *liberi* (Iustin 41.2.6) or ἐλεύθεροι.[46] The Persian equivalent to liberi is Āzād ('z't) known from inscriptions of the Sasanian period. The word serves as a generic term for the entire nobility and also more specifiy for the wider group of its lower ranks.[47]

As the upper ranks of nobility in the early Sasanian period, we know among the the Āzād (1) the „Kings" (Middle Persian: štldl'n - šahrdārān; Aramaic: MLK'; Greek: βασιλέως), (2) „princes" (M.Pers.: wspwtlk'n - vāspuhrāgān; Aram. BR BYT'); Gr. τοῦ ἐγ βασιλέως and (3) the „grandees, magnates" (M.Pers.: wclk'n - vuzurgān; Aram. RB'n).[48] Roman sources relate a limited number of names of kings, subordinate to the King of Kings, and high ranking nobles functioning as governors (satraps) or generals in war. They belong to the upper echelons of nobility. Only their members seem to have played any role in councils or at the king's court.[49]

A cluster of names is mentioned in connection with internal strife and turmoil caused by various pretenders to the throne at Ctesiphon between AD 35 and 48.[50] Among those nobles we find local dynasts as well as individuals or families, i.e. the Karen and Suren. Following Plutarch (Crassus 21.7) and Tacitus (Annales 6.42), the Suren held the traditional privilege to crown the Arsacid king. According to Wolski and others, these families belonged to the early Parthian or even Parnian (nomadic) followers of Arsaces who - supposedly - were rewarded for their support with large stretches of land together with large numbers of dependents.[51] „Diese abhängige Bevölkerung war neben der Bodenrente verpflichtet, ihrem Herrn kriegerische Dienste zu leisten und in seinem, nicht in dem Gefolge des Königs ins Feld zu ziehen"[52]. Accordingly Surena's retinue of 10,000 (Plutarch, Crassus 21.7) was explained as the expression of his landholdings he had inherited from his forefa-

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4,000 Roman cavalry men, or PLUTARCH, CRASSUS 19.1 on the 6,000 riders (hippeis) forming the entourage of the Armenian king who promises 10,000 kataphraktoi to Crassus.

[46] IOSEPHUS, Bellum Iudaicum 1.255; Jewish Antiquities 14.342 reports that Pacoros granted Herodes 200 ἱππεῖς, among them 10 ἐλεύτεροι.

[47] CHAUMONT (1989) 169-170; LUKONIN (1983) 699-700, contra OLBRYCHT (2003) 82 who identifies *Āzād* with the „upper rank of nobility". A number of texts use other generic terms for nobles of uncertain rank: ἄριστοι - PLUTARCH, Crassus 30.2; *illustres Parthis* - TACITUS, Annales 12.12 (the Karen family); *megistanes* - SUETON, Caligula 5 also used for Armenian nobles by TACITUS, Annales 15.27; Seneca, Ep. 21.4; *nobiles/nobilitas* - TACITUS, Annales 6.31; 11.10; 12.10; *primores* - TACITUS, Annales 2.2; 6.31; 6.37; cf. OLBRYCHT (2003).

[48] LUKONIN (1983) 698-713.

[49] LUKONIN (1983) 707-711.

[50] Cf. KARRAS-KLAPPROTH (1988).

[51] WOLSKI (1964) 382; WOLSKI (1976) 209. For KOSHELENKO (1980); KOSHELENKO and PILIPKO (1994) 144-145 and OLBRYCHT (2003) 87-8 the entire nobility of *Āzādān* (*liberi*) was formed by descendents of the Parnian nomadic aristocracy.

[52] WOLSKI (1989) 225.

thers of Parnian (or Parthian) descent.[53] Based on their landholdings and dependents, the nobles were supposed to have steadily increased their power against the frail and vulnerable power of the King of Kings.[54]

Still, doubts about this explanation persist on various levels. First, concerning the great families, there is no indication except for their Iranian names that they were Parnian or Parthian followers of the first Arsaces or his early successors. The Suren family first appears in our sources in 58 BC when Surenas helped Orodes II to defeat his brother Mithridates to become king (Iustin 42.4). In 53 BC the same Surenas was victorious against Crassus, but allegedly executed afterwards by Osroes II out of greed (Plutarch, Crassus 33).[55] Other members of the still important family plotted against Artabanos II in AD 35 (Tacitus, Annales 6. 31. 32. 36. 37. 44). A Karen is first heard of in AD 48 supporting the insurgency of Meherdates against Gotarzes (Tacitus, Annales 12.12). Afterwards both families basically disappear from the extent sources for three centuries to reenter the stage at court in the Sasanian period.[56] By then Suren family's estates were located in ancient Sakastan (modern Sistan) an area not conquered by the Arsacids earlier than the mid-second century BC.[57] Based on Moses Chorenaci, it was even assumed that the Pahlavi family which became hereditary kings of Sakastan were identical with the Suren family. But this certainly did not

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53 WOLSKI (1976) 209; WOLSKI (1989) 224: „Der Adel bezog seine Einkünfte wie überall im Altertum aus seinen Gütern, daneben auch aus dem gewinnbringenden Handelsaustausch zwischen dem Fernen Osten und dem Mittelmeerraum. Was den Boden anbelangt, so fielen dem Adel zusammen mit seinem Besitz auch die ihn bebauenden Leute zu. Das war ein Charakteristikum der orientalischen Gesellschaft seit alters her. Dieser ihm zur Verfügung stehenden Gefolgschaft verdankte der Adel aber seine Stellung im Staate". Cf. e.g. KOSHELENKO/PILIPKO (1994) 134: „The nobility of the purely Iranian regions [...] closely linked with the peripheral nomadic tribes [...] wished to pursue a broad expansionist policy, and with the ordinary fighting men dependent on them, formed the nucleus of Parthia's armed forces."; Olbrycht (2003) 77-89.

54 This view of the social structure is based on IUSTIN (42.2.5) who related that „the army is composed mostly of dependents rather than free men; and the dependent population increases daily, since no one is allowed to manumit [...]."

55 According to WOLSKI (1993) 114 this crime established tensions between the king and the aristocracy which finally led the leading families to revolt (50 years later).

56 MOSES CHORENACI, History of Armenia II 28, offers another, generally rejected version. According to him, Suren, Karen and Koshm Aspahbed were sons of Arshavir who is thought to be Phraates IV. While another Arshavir became successor to his father, the other three were given kingdoms in the east, cf. LUKONIN (1983) 705; GARSOÏAN (1989) 409-10. The Suren family itself is well attested in the Sasanian period. Among the individually known family members, we find a governor sent to Armenia by Khosraw I in AD 564 who caused trouble because of Zoroastrian zeal, as well as a Ctesiphon born bishop in the eighth century, cf. JUSTI (1895) 316-7 who lists 18 different family members. Unknown to him was the last attestation for this influential family which had fled eastward defending the Sasanian rule against Muslim troops. According to a grave inscription, a Suren princess died in China's Shensi province in 872 or 874, see SUNDERMANN/THILO (1966).

57 First proposed by HERZFELD (1931/32) 91-106; see also, e.g., LUKONIN (1983) 705.

happen before the later first century BC.[58] An earlier connection between the Suren and the Arsacids is only indicated by the „ancient custom" of crowning by the Suren family. But there is no need to see this custom as going back to joint (nomadic) experiences in the first phase of conquest[59]. The Suren family might well have been local rulers in Sakastan who decided to comply with Arsacid rule and were (peacefully) incorporated into the empire. Achaemenid imperial administration, Alexander's conquest and Seleucid history vividly demonstrate the need for cooperation with local rulers, the trust put into them by the central powers and the resulting persistence of established political structures and conditions of property.[60]

The continued rule by local dynasties is attested for various kingdoms within the Arsacid realm, e.g. Persis, Charakene (Mesene). Nevertheless, for the second half of the Arsacid Empire we can observe a deviation from this tradition. Starting with the reign of Artabanos II, but particularly during and after the reign of Vologases I, the local dynasts in most regions were replaced by members of the Arsacid family. As part of successful politics of consolidation following the period of fights between various pretenders to the throne, the brothers of the King of Kings' became the hereditary monarchs of larger provinces such as Media and Armenia.[61] Successively the Arsacid family took over Media Atropatene, Hyrkania[62], Characene and Elymais.[63] In the East at least Sakastan became a monarchy ruled by relatives of the King of Kings.[64] Contrary to the assumption of a larger influence by „nobles", we can, therefore, infer the King of Kings rising reliance on relatives. Accordingly, for the last 175 years of Arsacid rule, the - limited - Roman sources cease to mention internal conflicts. Furthermore, for the entire history of the Arsacid Empire, the Sasanid Ardašir is the first to challenge the rule of the Arsacid family.

Modern reconstructions of repeated to constant turmoil created by pretenders to the throne are thus based on the interpretation of coins issued by various kings at the same time. But the example of Characene shows that kings of important provinces had the right

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[58] ALRAM (1986) 218: „Die Pahlavas, eine parthische [i.e.: Arsacid, S.R.H.] Nebenlinie, vielleicht aus dem Geschlecht der Sürēn traten die Nachfolge der Sakas in Sistan an und bauten ihre Macht schrittweise nach Osten hin aus." For dating of available coins and genealogy see ALRAM (1986) 244-6.

[59] This is admitted by WOLSKI (1993) 90 who offers an alternative explanation. The Suren appear as rulers of the Sacae who fought against Mithridates II at the end of the second century BC. In order to win peace, Mithridates, who is usually assumed victorious, granted them this privilege. „Mais l'absence de sources n'y fournit pas de base", WOLSKI (1993) 90.

[60] E.g. BRIANT (2002) 852-871.

[61] This was no innovation by Vologases I. His predecessor Vonones had already been king of Media (TACITUS, Annales 12.14). Artabanos II had made his son king of Armenia (TACITUS, Annales 6.31). On the consolidation under VOLOGASES cf. NEUSNER (1963) 52; OLBRYCHT (1998a) 125-138; HAUSER (2005).

[62] SCHOTTKY (1991).

[63] SCHUOL (2000) 339.

[64] Cf. e.g. ALRAM (1986) 244. On the title „King" for rulers of provinces and its implications see Hauser (2005) 196-9.

and the duty (!) to issue coins. Except for certain cases (cf. the coinage of Vologases II, Pakoros and Artabanos III AD 78-81), we should be careful to assume conflicts not attested otherwise.[65] Textual evidence for internal strife is provided by the bilingual inscription of a bronze Heracles sculpture which states that in AD 155 the King of Kings Vologases (IV) confronted, defeated and replaced his cousin Pacoros, the king of Characene (Mesene).[66] With this exception the sources suggest a stable *pax arsacida.*

This observation is in conflict with Wolski's idea of the steadily rising importance of nobles which lacks support in the sources. In fact, after Vologases I ascended the throne in AD 51, Roman sources cease to mention any „grandees, magnates" which is only insufficiently explained by the limited number of available texts as Roman and indigenous sources still supply information on regional kings and local administrations.[67] Thus the important conclusions to draw are that we (1) miss evidence for the growing power of non-Arsacid nobles, (2) the Arsacid family took over the main provinces and thus tightened its grip of the empire. The question remains how much the King of King could trust his family.

III. The King of Kings: Weak or Powerful?

„The organization of the Parthian army is not clear, and lacking a standing force, a strict and complicated organization was unnecessary in any case."

Shabazi (1987) 496.

In the beginning the question was posed whether Herodian's report on the absence of a paid standing army (Herodian 3.1.2) has to be taken as an indication for the weakness of the King of Kings or not. According to the generally accepted scenario, it reflects the result of long lasting tensions between the increasingly strong, independent nobility and the weak central government. Advocates for this weakness theory argue that the development started with the increasing dependence of the King of Kings on troops belonging to local landowners, satraps or kings, and the growing self-awareness of the nobles. Support for the weakness of the central government could be found in the seemingly successful Roman invasions of Trajan (in AD 114-117), Avidius Cassius on behalf of Lusius Verus (in AD 165), Septimius Severus (in AD 197) and Antoninus (Caracalla, in AD 216). In all instances, the Romans at first conquered large tracts of (Northern) Mesopotamia without much resistance by larger armies probably indicating the absence of such troops.

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[65]   Cf. HAUSER (1998) 518; HAUSER (2000b).

[66]   al-SALIHI (1987); PENNACHIETTI (1987).

[67]   For the later part of the Arsacid Empire the dominant Roman literary sources are increasingly supplemented by local inscriptions, esp. from Hatra and Assur, cf. IBRAHIM (1986); BEYER (1998); HAUSER (1998).

On the other hand, the modern assumption of growing tensions between nobles and ruler and the King of King's loss of control is only based on the information on the intermingling of nobles in the succession of Arsacid rulers and Herodian's comment (3.1.2) two centuries later. A growing loss of authority is hardly sustained by the available sources. On the contrary, it completely disregards the important and amply available evidence for the King of Kings's control over army troops in the first to third century AD.

(1) In AD 72 Vologases I was able to offer Vespasian 40,000 mounted archers as auxiliary troops in his inner-Roman conflict about the Imperium Romanum. His offer came just twenty years after the end of the repeated, recurrent struggles within the Arsacid Empire, which usually serve as strongest argument for the weakness of central control. This obvious display of power is often overlooked in modern scholarship. In addition, Vologases I merely took up the active role of earlier Arsacid Kings of Kings who interfered as often in Roman politics as the Romans intervened in Parthian matters during the later Republic and the early principate. In his civil war with Caesar, Pompey considered taking refuge and applying for help at the Parthian court before he decided for Egypt.[68] A few years later, Caesar's murderers, especially Cassius, applied for help at the Arsacid court. Their envoy Labienus even decided to stay there after his confederates' defeat at Philippi in 42 BC. Furnished with Parthian troops by the King of Kings Orodes and accompanied by the latter's son Pacoros, he conquered large parts of the eastern Roman Empire between 41 and 39 BC.[69] The military might of the Arsacid King of Kings is well exemplified by Surenas' victory over Crassus in the battle at Carrhae in 53 BC. But albeit this battle is certainly one of the most famous in history, Surenas had only a minor part of the Parthian troops at his disposal. The main bulk of the army accompanied the Arsacid King Orodes II on his campaign against the Armenian king Artavasdes (Cassius Dio 40.16.2).

(2) Other cases where the King of Kings raised large armies were the repeated fights against Roman invasions of the second and early third century AD. Avidius Cassius (AD 165) and Septimius Severus (AD 197) conquered Northern Mesopotamia and came to the capital Ctesiphon. The most successful attempt by Trajan (AD 114-117) carried his troops down to the Persian/Arabian Gulf. Finally, in AD 216 Antoninus (Caracalla), on account of the Arsacid King of Kings' denial to marry his daughter to the Roman emperor, devastated parts of Northern Mesopotamia, i.e., Adiabene. As mentioned before the Romans at first met little resistance. But after a while the King of Kings, who in some instances had fled to Media, returned with enough troops to dispel the Romans. Thus, the response might not have been swift, but it was forceful nevertheless.

(3) In AD 155 the King of Kings Vologases (IV) confronted and defeated the king of Characene (Mesene) Pacoros as indicated by the inscription on the Heracles from

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[68] CASSIUS DIO 41.55 and 42,2. PLUTARCH, POMPEY 76; cf. DEBEVOISE (1938) 105; SONNABEND (1986) 179-181.

[69] CASSIUS DIO 48.24-26; IUSTIN 42.2.7-11; cf. DEBEVOISE (1938) 107-120.

Mesene.[70] Whatever the personal and functional relation between the two members of the Arsacid family, whether Characene was an integral part of the empire or had formerly enjoyed some kind of autonomy,[71] the fact important to our argument is that the King of Kings was obviously capable of raising an army large and strong enough to conquer this kingdom.

(4) All these examples show that the king was able to muster troops when needed. The same is implied by Herodian. While advocates of the King of Kings' weakness concentrated on the reported absence of a standing army, a more careful reading of this crucial passage suggests a different interpretation. According to Herodian, the situation was the following: In April 193 AD after the murder of the emperor Commodus (Marcus Aurelius C. Antoninus) and the short lived rule of Pertinax, Roman legions in Carnuntum hailed Septimius Severus as the new emperor while in Antiochia, Pescinnus Niger was acclaimed Augustus. After the troops in the west and the senate in Rom had accepted Severus' rule, he marched against Niger in July 193. In order to strengthen his forces, Niger sent emissaries to the kings of Parthia, Armenia and Hatra requesting alliances. This fact alone shows that Niger expected the King of Kings was able to help in the same way his predecessors had done on earlier occasions. Furthermore, if we trust the much criticized Herodian and believe that the King of Kings did not entertain a standing army, we also have to accept that he was in the position to order his satraps to fulfil their duties and levy troops. As the King of Kings did not appeal to his satraps, but commanded them, the story reports on strength, not on weakness. Herodian's report should be re-interpreted as a clear indication of the power the King of Kings wielded.

IV. The Organization of the Armed Forces

The aforementioned arguments suggest that the King of Kings could, to a large degree, trust his satraps, i.e., mainly the Arsacid kings of the various kingdoms within the Arsacid Empire and raise an huge army within reasonable time. Following from the above discussion, we may thus propose a different reconstruction of the Arsacid history. This also concerns the organization of the Parthian army. Obviously, we can list at least two kinds of professional troops, i.e., a standing army: (1) at fortresses for border control[72] and in garri-

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[70]   PENNACHIETTI (1987); AL-SALIHI (1987).

[71]   Following a proposition by BOWERSOCK (1987), it is often assumed that after Trajan's temporary occupation of Mesopotamia, Characene retained some form of independence from the Arsacid King of King, e.g., POTTER (1991); WIESEHÖFER (1994) 201; SCHUOL (2000) 459. The idea itself is based in the preconceived assumption of Parthian weakness. For a different interpretation cf. HAUSER (1998) and (2001). The question will be taken up on another occasion.

[72]   As long as there were castella, we should expect them to be manned. The existence of castella and garrisons is, therefore, indicative of the existence of a standing army at least on the fringes of the empire. But it is difficult to determine whether these troops immediately belonged to the King of Kings, the satraps (kings) or even lesser figures within the administration. Building inscriptions from the fortress at Khirbet

sons and (2) cataphracti, i.e. professionals whose training required a certain degree of surplus income. In addition, we can see huge armies of mounted archers and infantrymen who may or may not have had professional status. Certainly, a huge territorial army of reservists was available. These troops were usually levied by the satraps, i.e. members of the administration, on behalf of the king.

Thus, the situation is largely reminiscent of the Achaemenid period. In periods of peace three kinds of troops were actively present: (1) foreign troops stationed as satrapal garrisons in major cities and garrisons in the countryside; (2) a standing army of the king, partly at his disposal, but mainly present at satrapal seats; (3) local contingents of the satrap. In addition, military service was a major part of the tribute exacted from the various provinces in the Achaemenid Empire. All ethnic groups, and even semi-autonomous people not officially part of the empire, were forced to provide contingents.[73] Thus, a large number of additional reservists (a territorial army) could be called on in case of an emergency to fulfil their military duty.[74] These troops were usually dispersed on the fields and levied by the satrap who had to bring them to collecting points. A situation like this with an army largely based on people in the fields could well account for the slow response of Arsacid troops facing Roman invasions. Entrusting military defence largely to a territorial army is sensible as a standing army has to be sustained on high costs and raises the danger of military conflict.[75]

In the Achaemenid Empire the satrap was responsible for the various tasks of regional and imperial administration. He was responsible for maintaining the integrity of his satrapy against mutinies or external threats. In order to fulfil his duties he had local and state troops at his disposal. In the fifth and fourth century BC, satraps in the West were largely on their own in fighting insurrections and attacks. The king did not interfere as long as possible.[76] Despite difficulties in and temporary losses of Egypt, Ionia and Lydia, the system itself proved to be by and large successful until Alexander's assault. Nevertheless, there was no reason neither in antiquity nor in modern scholarship to doubt the power of the Achaemenid king who in case of need could raise his own army either in calling upon his satraps, sub-kings or cities to provide troops or in ordering a general mobilization which again made use of the various ranks of nobility/administration.

According to the above listed sources, the Arsacid Empire could well have used the same system of military organization in which the kings and satraps were held responsible for the

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Jaddalah (IBRAHIM (1986); BEYER (1998) 27) may indicate that fortresses were manned and even built by local dignitaries.

[73] See now KLINKOTT (2005) 170 with further literature; BROSIUS (2005).

[74] Detailed: KLINKOTT (2005) 283-6 with further literature.

[75] „Since they [i.e. professional military, S.R.H.] can hardly justify more support if there is no danger of war, they may have an interest in promoting military confrontation", FERGUSON (1990) 49.

[76] BRIANT (2002) passim; BROSIUS (2005) 153: „Nur in extremen Fällen entschied der König, dass seine Anwesenheit im Heer notwendig war."

order and peace of their respective provinces.[77] It explains why Roman troops in Mesopotamia were most often met by local authorities, not by the king. It also throws a different light on Herodian 3.9.9 in which he states that Vologases (V) at Ctesiphon „had little idea that Severus' war against Hatra was any concern of his. So he was inactive". Following the comparison with the Achaemenid period, Vologases may have considered the Roman transgression of borders as a localized conflict to be solved by his sub-king Sanatruces.[78] As in the Achaemenid period, the absence of the King of Kings from a campaign was no indication of his personal incapacity.[79] Only when Roman aggressions became full fledged invasions and a threat to the empire, the King of Kings felt obliged to organize the counterattack himself as in the cases of the various Roman invasions and the final onslaught on Arsacid rule, the insurrection of Ardašir in the AD 220s.

The Sasanian uprising finally demonstrated the weak points in a long-term successful system of political and military subsidiary. The power of the King of Kings was not based on immediate control of the military, but on his control of the nobles at court and in the provinces by means of guaranteeing their privileged status and moderating their conflicts. As much as the Achaemenid king lost his control over the empire in battles, but also because satraps changed sides, the last Arsacid King of King could no longer trust in his superior political and personal charisma and power.

But until the Sasanian revolt, close to the end of the Arsacid Empire, the King of Kings was in full control of the empire´s forces. He delegated the administration of the troops, their levying and their deployment during war to trusted (sub)kings and nobles, usually those who were in charge/responsible for the security of particular regions. For the latter half of the empire's existence, these were mostly members of the Arsacid family. If the danger became so imminent or when he identified superior interests of the state, the King of King ordered his satraps to levy troops as is witnessed by Herodian.

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[77]   It is likely that the status of Arsacid kings, i.e. governors, is in some way comparable to Roman governors of the imperial age who were guided by imperial *mandata* (instructions) which dictated policy and largely inhibited independent action. Mithridates of Characene might have trespassed a certain line. Still it is doubtful that the organization was exactly the same all over the huge Arsacid Empire, cf. the Achaimenid Empire where various forms of administration and political organization existed side by side at the same time.

[78]   On Hatra's relation to the Arsacid Empire see HAUSER (1998).

[79]   Cf. BROSIUS (2005) 153.

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