

UDC 94(37):94(3)

**THE PARTHIANS – A WORTHY ENEMY OF ROME?
REMARKS ON ROMAN-PARTHIAN POLITICAL CONFLICT
IN THE 1st cent. B. C., AND ITS INFLUENCE ON ROMAN IMPERIAL IDEOLOGY**

H. Kryśkiewicz

Research Assistant

Institute of History and International Relations

Faculty of Humanities, University of Szczecin

71–79, Krakowska Str., 71–017, Szczecin, Poland

hadrian@poczta.ig.pl

As history has proven, sometimes the essence of one's failure becomes best encapsulated in the way he then celebrates his long-awaited retaliation. In the Parthian case, the above law also seems to find its confirmation. In the following article, we research the topic of foreign relations of the Roman Empire with the Arsacid monarchy (Parthian Empire) in the 1st cent. B. C. The paper regards the overall notion of first diplomatic encounters of the two superpowers, as well as the issue of their military struggles in the period. Starting with the circumstances of the first official embassy between L. Cornelius Sulla and the Parthian emissary Orobazos (first decade of the 1st cent. B. C.), through the defeat of M. Crassus' legions at Carrhae (53 B. C.), Julius Caesar's own plans for conducting a Parthian campaign (45–44 B. C.), Mark Antony's eastern expedition (36 B. C.), as far as to emperor Augustus' success in restitution of the lost legionary ensigns (20 B. C.), the paper focuses on the matter of the possible position, as well as the origins of the then-stereotypical image, that the Parthians could have had well developed in Roman imperial ideology as in result of the above historical events. What impact did Crassus' defeat possibly have on the Roman military elites and *populus Romanus* as such from that time? Where did the underpinnings of the entire Roman-Parthian conflict lie?

Keywords: Rome, propaganda, imperial ideology, Middle East, Parthia, 1st century B. C.

In the early years of the 1st c. B. C., possibly – in 92- [Sykes 1915, 365; Debevoise 1938, 46; Ziegler 1964, 20; Ball 2002, 13], or perhaps (as some scholars argue) 96 B. C. [Badian 1959; Badian 1964, 157 ff.; Olshausen 1972, 812; Keaveney 1981; Letzner 2000, 100; Wolski 2003, 76], L. Cornelius Sulla – a governor of Cilicia at that time – had been approached by Orobazos, an envoy of the Parthian king Mithridates the IInd 'the Great'. The meeting was supposedly held somewhere in the eastern parts of Cappadocia – most likely on the border zone between the Armenian cities of Melitene and Tomisa [Ziegler 1964, 20, abb. 2; Letzner 2000, 101, abb. 96], and presumably near the very river of Euphrates itself, since Plutarch speaks of Sulla '*lingering on its banks*' whilst being interrupted by the Parthian ambassador (Plut. *Sul.* 5.4). Whereas propraetor Sulla arrived – as Plutarch suggests – in the company of Ariobarzanes (that is: the newly appointed ruler of Cappadocia), Orobazos is said to have had appeared within an entourage of "wise men" ('*magi*' – as Velleius puts it), one of whom, a Chaldean, was to thereafter promise the Roman great fortune (Plut. *Sul.* 5.5-6; Vell. Pat. II, 24.3; on Ariobarzanes cf. Florus III, 5.12 [I, 40]).

The meeting itself has been historically recognised as the very first encounter of Roman and Parthian (Iranian) circles of civilisations and cultures, one which ultimately resulted in establishing preliminary diplomatic relations between the two powers [Dobiáš, 1931/1932, 221–223; Wolski 1985, 226 f.; Dąbrowa 2012, 30]. And the word "preliminary" deserves further accentuation. As ancient authors accordingly attest, Orobazos sought to discuss a treaty of friendship ('*amicitia*'/'*philia*'), and perhaps even an alliance of sorts ('*symmachia*'), to be entered with Rome (Festus 15.2; Liv. *Epit.* 70; Plut. *Sul.* 5.4;

Vell. Pat. II, 24.3). However, contrary to the generally amicable course of the initial embassies of Parthia and China (ca. 115 B. C.) – which brought about the further reinforcement of friendly relations, as well as an improvement in matters of mutual trade [Sykes 1915, 365 f.; Ghirshman 1978, 250] – the outcome of Sulla's encounter with Orobazos had been otherwise marked with a general mistrust, penalty, and ambiguity of demands; a notion that was to foreshadow the upcoming rivalry [Ball 2002, 13]. For Sulla – either due to his personal traits, or simply because of him “misinterpreting” Parthian terms – responded in an apparently haughty manner, perceiving Orobazos' offer as a mere tributary proposal, in effect of which Parthia would have had therefore become yet another client state of Rome [Debevoise 1938, 46].

As such, no solid premises exist of any formal *consensus* between Parthia and Rome being achieved at that time, besides the possibility of purely verbal arrangements. Furthermore, if to consider the fact, that a diplomatic treaty in Rome's name would have had first required its official approval by the Senate, the latter option appears rather doubtful, since we possess no information of Sulla forwarding such petition to Rome, after the negotiations had taken place (a step he did not hesitate to take, however, after participating in a similar mission in Numidia, in 105 B. C.) [Ziegler 1964, 21–23].

The Arsacid king thus soon responded by ordering the execution of his envoy. Supposedly, the reason was that Orobazos had let himself to be seated lower than the Roman representative during the negotiations – a symbolical disgrace of the Parthian monarch's authority, that Plutarch meaningfully accentuates in his narrative (Plut. *Sul.* 5.4 f.). What yet appears as a second (and perhaps far more probable) reason for Orobazos' death sentence, is that he had also allowed the presence of king Ariobarzanes in the – eventually tripartite – discussion. The above ruler had been most likely perceived by the Parthians in terms of an usurper, therefore a person unworthy of becoming an equal diplomatic side in the meeting. As for Sulla's approach towards the Parthian case in general, it seems to have had been pretty much influenced with the more immediate issue of the neighbouring states of Pontus and Armenia, the policies of which were to pose a serious threat to the desires of Roman further conquest in the East [Wolski 1995, 56]. The latter could have had also become an important obstacle in carrying out the Arsacids' own plans regarding the Syrian coast. Hence the idea of Orobazos' embassy to Sulla, therefore of establishing at least a temporary political counterbalance for the Pontic-Armenian dominance in the region [Sykes 1915, 366].

The origins of Roman presence in the eastern Mediterranean theatre might be traced as far back as to the Empire's struggle with Hannibal of Carthage during the IInd Punic War (218–201 B. C.) and the series of conflicts with Philip the Vth of Macedon that soon followed [Kucharczak 1976, 42]. The opportunity to thence interfere with matters of Greece became even further magnified, when Rome had subjugated the kingdom of Attalids – Pergamon – and soon thereafter established a new province of Asia, in 129 B. C. [Wolski 1995, 223; Ostrowski 2005, 40]. From that time onward, the range of Roman influence had been gradually expanding towards the more and more distant, eastern parts of Anatolia, to ultimately also include the aim of dominance at the Caspian-, and the Syrian coasts altogether.

The “fuel”, that had driven the prized commanders of the *res publica* throughout their eastern campaigns, or – the very essence of Roman imperialism, might be highlighted as a mixture of both prosaic reasons of common need for new lands, money, and the broadly named riches of the Orient, as well as the more personal desires of obtaining military fame and glory [Erskine 2010, 33–49, 62 ff.]. In the late republican period, however, the above palette was yet to be noticeably enhanced, with elaborate motives deriving from state ideology ultimately creating a *visage* of Rome as a “cradle of civilisation” [André 1982, 56–72], destined to become ‘*dominus regum, victor atque imperator omnium gentium*’, as Cicero put it (*Dom.* 90). The above conviction obviously resembles an implication of the Romans being symbolically elevated above other nations, that inhabit the

known *'Oikoumene'*, therefore towards whom Rome was to generally represent a condescending attitude – and the Parthians were no exception [Vogt 1929, 12–13 f.].

Regarding the Arsacids and their oriental dominion, one needs to be mindful of the highly subjective and limited scope, provided by the legacy of Greco-Roman narrative sources [Wolski 1979, 17–21; Dąbrowa 2012, 21–25]. Despite therein contained suggestions, the Parthian state had in fact been centred upon well-organised and capable government of absolute power (based on feudal-like society structures) – a characteristic which could hardly be applicable regarding the various tribes, numerous encountered by the Romans in northern Europe. What is more, the Parthians had also managed to develop their own complex ideology, military, and cultural programme, all in all reaching all the way back to the legacy of Achaemenidian Persia; the title of 'King of Kings' (regularly used by the Parthian monarchs ever since Mithridates the IInd), might well serve as a meaningful implication of imperial ambitions among the Arsacids [Wolski 1966]. One of the main underpinnings of Parthian imperialism proved to be the restitution of Darius' empire at the height of its territorial prime [Wolski 1976, 214].

Significant progress in fulfilling the above had been achieved, when the kings: Mithridates the Ist (ca. 171–138 B. C.), and his namesake, Mithridates the IInd (123–88/87 B. C.), took considerable efforts in order to lead a large-scale military expansion (ca. 148–120 B. C.). Amongst the results came to be both: the conquest of Asia as far as to the very Himalayas to the east, and the establishment of Parthian dominance in Mesopotamia – to the west [Sykes 1915, 361 f.; Debevoise 1938, 26, 40 ff.; Dąbrowa 2005, 73–77, 85 f.]. The next step would henceforth be to decisively subjugate the neighbouring regions of Armenia and Syria, for both to secure a major source of income from overseas trade (Syria), as well as to gain a convenient geopolitical basis for any future military undertakings – either in terms of offensive, as well as defensive actions (the natural, mountainous landscape of Armenia) [Frye 1962, 186 ff.; Wolski 1976, 198–209; Wolski 1980, 251, 253–255 f.].

Though of entirely different cultural origin and ideology, both Rome and Parthia were to therefore share similar ambitions for dominance in the Middle East, both of them proved to become states imposing in its overall size, and both of them were pretty much at the height of an impressive territorial expansion at the time of Orobazos' mission to Sulla. As Warwick Ball accurately summarises: *“two brand new superpowers flexing their outward muscles, one claiming the mantle of Alexander, the other the mantle of Cyrus, both meeting face-to-face at the Euphrates which formed their border. It only required a spark to ignite the inevitable”* [Ball 2002, 13].

For the time being, however, the tide of a direct confrontation was yet to be postponed. In the first decades of the Ist c. B. C., it happened to be the joint enterprise of king Mithridates the VIth Eupator of Pontus (ca. 120–63 B. C.) and his ally, Tigranes the IInd the Great (ca. 95/94–55 B. C.) of Armenia, which had primarily drawn the eyes of Roman commanders [Olshausen 1972; Keaveney 1998, 111 ff.].

During the Mithridatic Wars, spanning from 89 to 63 B. C., the Parthian Empire had eventually been introduced as an ever watchful, though mainly a by-standing observer of the ongoing conflict at its western borders. Such policy was partly motivated by the fact that the Arsacids at that time fell in one of their many turbulent periods of internal disorder and rebellion. This one: ranging approximately as early as since the death of Mithridates the IInd (87 B. C.), to the very ascension of king Phraates the IIIrd (ca. 71/70–58/57 B. C.) [Olbrycht 2009, 164–170 f.]. It ought to be underlined, that (in an overview) dynastic struggles remained a considerable weakness throughout the course of the Arsacid reign in the history of ancient Iran, although still – not as big, as it had been exaggerated over by the ancient Greco-Roman authors.

It would be an oversimplification to deem, that Rome's upcoming successes in the Mithridatic Wars were to be somehow “omitted” by its new eastern neighbour, towards whom the borders of the Empire had been by now rapidly bringing up close together. The Arsacids had most likely possessed an excellent intelligence network at their disposal –

a meaningful fact which was yet to manifest itself on several occasions [Olbrycht 1998, 140]. Furthermore, regardless of internal instability in the period, the range of Parthian influence in the Middle East had possibly been maintained, both regarding the rulers of Judea, Commagene, and perhaps even the distant Arabia, whom all the more favoured the Arsacid policies, the closer it was to establishing Roman supremacy in the region [Debevoise 1938, 94; Wolski 1995, 58 f.; Wheeler 2007, 240 ff.]. Lastly, Parthian monarchs had yet successfully struggled to preserve its propaganda image of a powerful side in the ongoing western conflict by engaging in diplomatic negotiations with both M. Lucullus, as well as Cn. Pompeius (see: Plut. *Pomp.* 76.4) at some point during their eastern campaigns in the 60s [Sykes 1915, 371; Keaveney 1981, 203 ff.; Keaveney 1998, 127].

As it may be supposed, however, from the Roman perspective, the above had none but slightly affected the general remark on the Parthian state; in the worldview of the Romans, Parthia was most likely still to maintain the status of a remote and shadowy nation, lying somewhere far East, one that supposedly does not really pose a serious threat to the plans of the Empire's further conquest in that war-theatre.

The antagonism between Rome and Parthia was yet soon to resurface, with Pompey the Great committing his crowning achievement regarding Rome's expansion in the middle East, and that is: firstly – the subjection of Armenia in 66 B. C., and then – the pacification of Syria and Judea in the year 64/63 B. C [Kucharczak 1976, 51 f.; Dąbrowa 1986, 94–96]. With the above being accomplished, Rome's eyes could now well turn over to the government organisation of the newly acquired provinces, whilst the Empire's ambitions could stretch out even further east, to the lands of Mesopotamia and India (mostly recognised with their legendary conquest by the hands of one of Rome's most prized and all the while looked-up-to idols or heroes, Alexander the Great).

Hence, in 55 B. C., A. Gabinius – the proconsul of Syria since 57 B. C. – became one of the first Romans (after Lucullus and Pompey) ever to cross the Euphrates with an attempt of establishing Roman military presence in Mesopotamia (App. *Syr.* 51; Cic. *Att.* IV, 10.1; Dio XXXIX, 56.3; Jos. *AJ* XIV, 6.2 (98); Jos. *Bell. jud.* I, 8.7 (175–176)). However, the simultaneous opportunity to intervene in Ptolemaic matters in Egypt, eventually made Gabinius withdraw from the Euphrates theatre [Sampson 2008, 94–98, 103 ff.]. And yet another, far more numerous and ambitious military undertaking was bound to follow: the expedition of M. Licinius Crassus for the riches of the East (if not the very India).

The circumstances, the course, as well as the very outcomes of the campaign, have all been a subject well explored by scholars [Smith 1916; Timpe 1962; Ball 2002, 13, 114 f.; Kane 2008; Sampson 2008]. Crassus' expedition (54–53 B. C.), as we may infer – motivated primarily by the general's greed, as well as his presumable desire to follow in Alexander the Great's footsteps through succeeding in his own grand conquest of the Orient (therefore surpassing both Pompey's, and Julius Caesar's military achievements) ended in a complete disaster, with more than 20.000 soldiers killed (Crassus among them) and another 10.000 legionaries taken into captivity by the Parthian cavalry, as a result of the battle of Carrhae in 53 B. C [Smith 1916, 237, 260 f.; Scullard 2011, 105 f.]. By all accounts, the defeat was meant to become a historical breakthrough: if not even as much in matters of military tactics, than certainly in terms of Roman attitude towards Parthia [Sykes 1915, 379 f.; Sampson 2008, 83 f.; Scullard 2011, 106]. There are reasons to believe, that the disaster at Carrhae had considerably influenced Roman worldviews regarding the Middle East, with the Arsacid state being from this time onward ranked among Rome's most deadly foes, as one having '*an empire comprehending so large an extent of country, and so many nations, that it almost rivals that of the Romans in magnitude*', for to only quote Strabo (Strab. XI 9.2; cf. Dio XL, 14.3-4; Herodian IV, 10.2 ff.; Just. XLI, 1.1). Alas, as Józef Wolski once remarked, Rome's policy of "easy conquest" in the East had definitely ended with the era of Pompey the Great [Wolski 1994, 89].

The battle of Carrhae exposed the art of Parthian warfare, essentially based on the cooperative actions of two cavalry branches: the lightly armed regiments of highly skilled

mounted bowmen, known as the *'pelatai'*, and the squads of heavy armed horsemen called the *'cataphracti'*, together capable of inflicting devastating damage to the enemy [Mielczarek 1993, 42 f.]. The outcome of the 53 B. C. confrontation had also signalled the need of improving the overall range of battle tactics employed by the Romans, though it does not seem to have had a decisive influence on the overall structure of the imperial army as such [Wheeler 2007, 263].

Whereas the scale of losses at Carrhae – biggest since Cannae (216 B. C.), and one of the most immense in the entire history of the Roman army – might have been interpreted in the Eternal City as a bitter military disgrace of sorts, yet the fact of the simultaneous capture of legionary ensigns (*signa militaria*) by the Parthians, all the while proved to become a calamity to the Romans [Wissemann 1982, 4–10 ff., 35–45, 63 f.]. The effort to thence recover the lost standards, along with the aim of avenging Crassus' shame by conquering the Arsacid kingdom, was to serve as a pivotal propaganda notion of all the upcoming campaigns made against the Parthians over the course of the next few centuries, and all the while – a compulsory step to take, in order for the *Imperium Romanum* to eventually establish its dreamed world dominance [Mastino 1986, 79, 97, 102 f.].

As much as the extant historiographical sources of the Roman side indeed emphasize over the Carrhae disaster, rarely can we encounter in these sources similarly detailed mentions from the ancient writers, that the Parthians had most likely also suffered major disgrace as in result of M. Crassus' campaign. The thorough pillage of the city of Zenodotion [Cohen 2013, 90] as well as of other, minor settlements at the north-western border of Mesopotamia by the Roman troops in the winter of 54/53 B. C., could have had brought considerable implications for the temporary loss of authority, which Parthia had possibly possessed amongst the rulers of the various neighbouring states [Debevoise 1938, 81 ff.; Wolski 1995, 58]. Moreover, it does not seem likely, that the formal mistreatment earlier received at the hands of Sulla and Pompey, would easily be forgotten by the Parthian monarchs [Sykes 1915, 371, 381; Timpe 1962, 114–116; Scullard 2011, 106].

The consecutiveness of political as well as military events, which were to follow in the nearest years to come, seems well to indicate, that the battle of Carrhae may also be historically approached as an event signalling the beginning of a period of Parthian military offensives against the Roman possessions in the Middle East. Guided by crown prince Pacorus – son of the current king of Parthia, Orodes the IInd (ca. 57–38 B. C.) – the Arsacid army was to cross the Euphrates and invade Roman Syria, inflicting major damages therein – firstly, most likely still in 53 B. C., and secondly: just two years after, in 51 B. C. (Cic. *Ad fam.* XV, 1), when the Parthian cavalry had managed to severely pillage the city of Antioch (Dio XL, 38–40). However, the upcoming news of yet another dynastic plot being uncovered at king Orodes' court (50 B. C.), made Pacorus eventually withdraw from further raids on the Syrian coast – at least for the time being [Sykes 1915, 380 f.].

Pacorus' undertaking – devised most likely as a looting campaign, and perhaps also as an effort of symbolically accentuating the dominance of Parthian authority in the region – became possible essentially due to the major “gap”, that the loss of Crassus' legions had in fact created in the Roman system of defences.

Yet still far as until the very IInd c. A. D. (!), the Romans did not manage to develop any considerable form of military “reserve”, nor any additional lines of strategic fortifications against the barbarians, besides the outermost *limes*. Because of the above, any major military defeat – either during the republican, or the later imperial period in Rome – could have had aroused justified anxiety (if not even fear) amongst the Empire's populace [Campbell 2004, 78; Ostrowski 2005, 48]. What follows, in the nearest months following Crassus' defeat in the Middle East, none appeared to be left to oppose Parthian forces rallying towards Antioch, but the local town garrisons, and the legionary remnants under the command of quaestor C. Cassius Longinus (whom himself had previously narrowly escaped death at Carrhae) [Smith 1916, 261–262].

The Parthian threat to Syria was far from over. Likely having a favourable opinion among the societies of Armenia, Syria, and Judea, as well as making effective use of the capable intelligence network at his possession, the Arsacid king awaited patiently for the next available opportunity to strike with imposing force at its Roman foe. Thus a meaningful fact remains, that soon after Rome was to enter a period of major internal disorder and political turmoil, known as the civil war between the caesarians and the optimates in the years 44–42 B. C, it came to be none other, but precisely Parthia, that quickly started to: firstly – orderly prepare (since 44 B. C.), and soon thereafter launch a major scale offensive (of about 10.000 strong), in the spring of 40 B. C. The initiative – carried out once again under the guide of Pacorus – actually might be perceived in terms of a strategic counter-action, that forestalled Mark Antony's own plans for waging war against Parthia at that time. According to Cassius Dio, Pacorus' attack caught Antony still in Alexandria, completely unprepared (Dio XLVIII, 24, 6–8).

Yet prior to the invasion, the Parthian king Orodes the IInd succeeded in establishing diplomatic treaties with the conspirators (Brutus and Cassius), seemingly offering military support, whereas actually securing his interests regarding the broadly named control over the Syrian coast in the process (App. *Bell. civ.* IV, 59 et IV, 88). Also, as one of the results of the Parthian diplomacy efforts, general Q. Labienus – previously sent as an envoy to king Orodes on behalf of Brutus and Cassius (Dio XLVIII, 24.4–5) – took an important part in the foregoing invasion on the Parthian side, entitling himself as the very PARTHICUS IMPERATOR ('the commander of the Parthians') whilst aiding Pacorus and his army in their plans (Dio XLVIII, 26.5; Strab. XIV, 2.24–25; Plut. *Ant.* 28.1).

The campaign began with Pacorus' swift subjection of nearly the entire province of Syria, as well as the region of Palestine, where the pro-Parthian Antigonos had been installed in Herod's place (Dio XLVIII, 26.2). Meanwhile, encountering but little resistance, Labienus set out with the rest of the Parthian forces towards Anatolia. Eventually, he succeeded in conquering an impressive part of Asia Minor, amongst which the provinces of Cilicia and Lydia have all been subdued (Plut. *Ant.* 30.2). Furthermore, there are premises to believe that Labienus' authority might have had also been by that time acknowledged at the southern coast of the Black Sea – in Bithynia (cf. Strab. XII, 8.9). Otherwise, Parthian cavalry troops had made it as far west, as to the very Caria and Ionian coast. Therein, they most likely ransacked the cities of Alabanda, Mylasa, and perhaps were even witnessed in the very Ephesus (Dio XLVIII, 26.3–4; Strab. XIV 2.24 f.; Tac. *Ann.* III, 62.2). As Józef Wolski remarked, never were the Arsacids so close in fulfilling their Achaemenid dream, than in that very decade of the forties Ist c. B. C. [Wolski 1994, 90].

The Parthian conquest also proved to be surprisingly elusive, however. For Labienus has been repelled from Asia Minor just a year after the offensive (39 B. C.), and Pacorus with his army was decisively defeated by the hands of general Q. Ventidius Bassus in a battle upon the plains of Gindaros, in 38 B. C. (with Pacorus himself killed). Nonetheless, the fact alone of such an outstanding or well thought political and military initiative being brought to life on behalf Orodes the IInd, remains [Ostrowski 2005, 46]. Pacorus' campaign and Parthian successes in Anatolia yet all the while brought about another major disgrace of Rome – for the Mediterranean theatre has had not witnessed such a military withdrawal on the Empire's behalf ever as far back, as to the time of Rome's confrontation with Hannibal of Carthage [Wolski 1995, 59].

To even further accentuate the presence of the Arsacid kingdom in the general notion of Roman political affairs in the period, it ought to be reminded, that it again proved to be Parthia, that was to become the ultimate, though never actually achieved target of conquest of Julius Caesar's grand eastern expedition, being prepared perhaps as far back as 46–45 B. C. The dictator's tragic death in 44 B. C. prevented the initiative from coming into life, however [Malitz 1984]. Several years later, it also appeared to be the same very Parthia towards which Mark Antony turned his blade with yet another military campaign to avenge Crassus' shame (36 B. C.).

A meaningful fact remains, that Antony's undertaking had been in fact already previously acknowledged as no less, but one of the triumvir's formal obligations [underl. author] required to fulfil on part of the Brundisium treaty signed with Octavian and M. Lepidus in 40 B. C. [Brunt 1971, 498]. Antony's Parthian escapade, however – despite the fact of amassing a total army force of 16 legions strong (that being twice as much, as Caesar had possessed in Gaul!) – was to nevertheless end in a fashion similar to that of Crassus' enterprise in 53 B. C., with thousands Roman soldiers dead or wounded, the prized legionary ensigns yet again captured, and Antony's popularity itself suffering a major decrease [Sherwin-White 1984, 311–321; Dąbrowa 2006, 323–325, 349 f.].

As history has proven, sometimes the essence of one's failure becomes best encapsulated in the way he then celebrates his long-awaited retaliation. In the Parthian case, the above law also seems to find its confirmation.

In the year 20 B. C., emperor Augustus succeeded in recovering the prisoners and the lost standards from both M. Crassus' as well as M. Antony's unfortunate expeditions. What's more, Augustus achieved the above in an uncommon, for peaceful and diplomatic way – or, at least, that is what the princeps wanted the posteriority to believe (in light of imperial propaganda). Tiberius as his emissary to king Phraates the IVth (ca. 37–2 B. C.) and meanwhile also as a mediator in the turbulent Armenia case (cf. Dio LIV, 9.4–5; Jos. *AJ* XV, 105; RG XXVII, 2; Strab. XVII, 1.54; Tac. *Ann.* II, 3; Vell. Pat. II, 94.4). As to the broadly named outcome of the restitution of the standards, let us summon alone the voice of Paul Zanker, one of the most art and ideology historians regarding the Augustan age. As he notes, *this event [i.e. the ensigns' recovery] was endowed with an extraordinary significance [...] It was regarded as one of the prerequisites for the opening of the Golden Age [the propaganda-created myth of Augustan peace, vitality and prosperity]. But at the same time, in the celebration of this triumph was realized a new conception of victory, which saw the ruler as the invulnerable victor and guarantor of the world order* [Zanker 1988, 183 f.].

Soon after 20 B. C., a victory arch has been erected in Rome to commemorate the recovery of the standards, as well as the symbolic motif of a kneeling Parthian has been popularised – among others – in various numismatic mints of the Roman Empire's coinage. Also, a magnificent and imposing statue of the so called Augustus of Prima Porta, came to bear important references to the Parthian victory, carved on the front side of the statue's armour. And yet to say – last but not the least – the triumph over the Parthians has been allegorically immortalised in the various works of Augustan literature, from Horace's *Ode's* and *Letters*, through Ovid's *Fasti* and Sextus Propertius' elegies, as far as to the epic *Aeneid*, authorship of Virgil himself [Debevoise 1938, 140–144; Rose 2005].

The above may only show how important the role of diminishing the disgrace suffered against the Parthians might have had in fact played for the Roman public opinion (or the Roman elites) at that time, and what authority potential actually lied for a person who succeeded in expiating a military calamity of such kind [Merriam 2004, 57–59 ff.]. What also ought to be noted, is that – from a political perspective – Rome's relations with the Parthian state during Augustus' rule were to be maintained at a generally calm (nevertheless reserved) diplomatic level, whereas the Parthian border overall did not bear the signs of an unstable one [Ziegler 1964, 45–57, 82–96; Timpe 1975].

Both the ensigns' recovery, the temporarily stable status in the problematic Armenia case (and the political course of its rulers), as well as the lack of any further known military offensives of Parthia on the Syrian coast at that time, all became possible due to yet another period of internal instability in the Arsacid kingdom, that was to eventually mark Phraates the IVth's reign (especially the final years). It also appears as a similar reason, why Phraates had sometime later sent his four sons to Augustus' court in Rome – as in affirmation of maintaining peaceful neighbourly policies between the two states (ca. 10 B. C.) [Ziegler 1964, 51 f.; Dąbrowa 1987, 64 ff.]. However, though dynastic struggles in Parthia at the turn of the discussed centuries weighted heavily upon its ability to ac-

tively forge political influence in Syria, as well as in the Caucasus, the Arsacids in fact did all but to resign from further rivalry with Rome over imperial dominance in the Middle East. The Armenian case was to still play a pivotal role in the overall course of the Arsacid policies in the later period as well, whilst the Parthian rulers were yet to prove their capability of conducting effective military campaigns in order of re-establishing the previous range of their political dominion – thus including Armenia as Parthia’s westernmost buffer zone [Olbrycht 1998, 121–134 ff., 150 f., 154].

From the Roman point of view, however, despite the fact that a symbolic and diplomatic victory of 20 B. C. has been achieved by Augustus, the opportunity for a military *vendetta* was still to tempt Roman minds, and be left as a legacy of sorts for future emperors, to uphold – and to eventually fulfil (the campaigns of emperor Trajan and Septimus Severus).

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As we might infer from the overall course of events in the Ist c. B. C., Parthia – in spite of first appearances – proved to be a formidable and well organised opponent of the Imperium Romanum, one possessing the resources as well as the manpower to struggle for dominance in the Middle East.

Both M. Crassus, Julius Caesar, as well as Mark Antony, all chose Parthia as their intended target of conquest; it came to be because they viewed such an expedition as an easy way to boost their authority or to keep the public opinion in Rome somehow else occupied, but they also did it most likely because: the victory over the Parthian Empire by that time has already been becoming more and more often perceived as an integral part of the Roman imperial ideology. The Arsacid Empire had possibly symbolised the broadly comprehended wealth and mystery of the Orient, but it had also – since Crassus’ campaign – more and more often reminded of the very defeat of the Roman legions.

Augustus’ propaganda success in 20 B. C. serves as a clear underline of the position, that the Parthians had in fact assumed in ancient Roman worldviews. From a yet unknown and underestimated nation from the times of Sulla, they quickly transformed into a fierce, all the while primary opponent of Rome from amongst all of the encountered eastern barbaric nations. Rivalry with Parthia over the Armenian and Syrian case, was to thence become an integral part of Rome’s overall policies employed in the Middle East, whilst the dream of the Mesopotamian conquest was to tickle the ambitions of numerous later emperors, from Nero and Trajan, to Severus, Caracalla and beyond.

LIST OF JOURNAL ABBREVIATIONS

ANRW – *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt. Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung* (hrsg. W. Haase, H. Temporini)
WJA – Würzburger Jahrbücher für die Altertumswissenschaft

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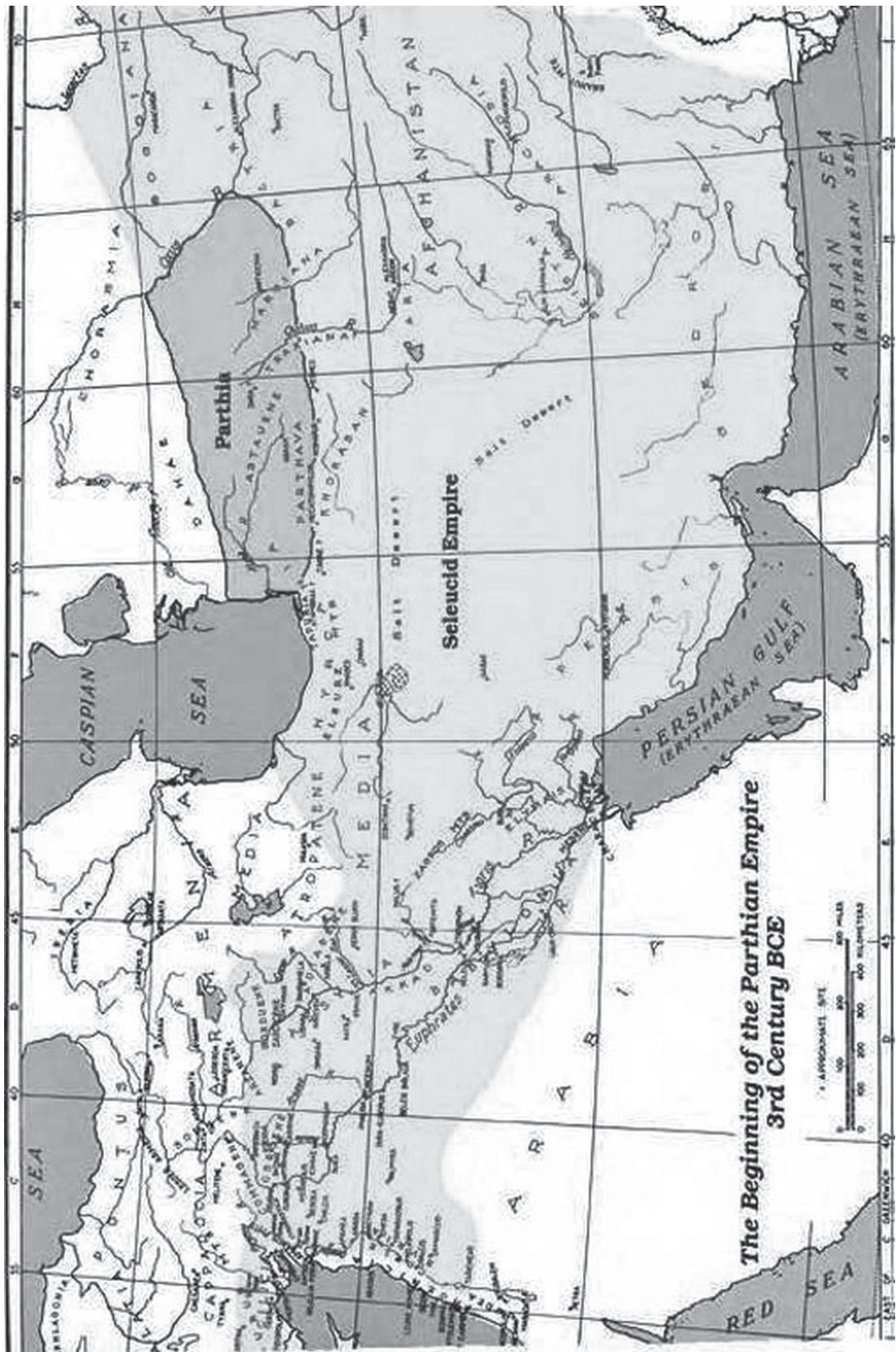
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1. The Parthian Empire ca. 14 A.D.

(Source: <http://www.iranpoliticsclub.net/maps/maps04/index.htm>) [on-line 02.08.2016]

The Parthians – a Worthy Enemy of Rome? Remarks on Roman-Parthian Political Conflict...



2. The Kingdom of Armenia at the turn of of Ist c. B. C.–Ist c. A. D.
 (Source: <http://www.iranpoliticsclub.net/maps/maps04/index.htm>)
 [on-line 02.08.2016]



3. Roman-Parthian war frontier, Ist c. B. C.
 (Source: <http://www.iranpoliticsclub.net/maps/maps04/index.htm>)
 [on-line 02.08.2016]

**Парфяни – гідний ворог Риму? Ремарки
щодо римсько-парфянського політичного конфлікту
в I ст. до н. е. і його впливу на римську імперську ідеологію**

Х. Л. Крюкевич

Як показала історія, іноді сутність невдачі найкращим чином проявляється в наслідках події. У випадку Парфянської держави вищезгаданий закон також, здається, знаходить своє підтвердження. У представленій статті ми досліджуємо тему зовнішніх зв'язків Римської імперії з монархією Арсакидів (Парфянська імперія) в I ст. до нашої ери. У роботі розглядаються перші дипломатичні зіткнення двох могутніх держав, а також питання їхніх військових зіткнень у цей період. Починаючи з обставин першого офіційного посольства між Л. Корнеліусом Суллою і парфянським емісаром Оробазосом (перше десятиліття I ст. до н. е.) і розглядаючи далі поразку легіонів М. Красса в битві при Каррах (53 р. до н. е.), власні плани Юлія Цезаря з проведення парфянської кампанії (45–44 рр. до н. е.), східну експедицію Марка Антонія (36 р. до н. е.) та успіх імператора Августа в поверненні втрачених штандартів легіонів (20 р. до н. е.), в роботі основна увага приділяється формуванню образу парфян, як і витокам тодішнього стереотипного сприйняття їх та їхньої держави в римській імперській ідеології, як результату вищезазначених історичних подій. Який вплив мала поразка Красса на римську військову еліту і *populus Romanus* того часу? Де лежать глибинні основи всього римсько-парфянського конфлікту?

Ключові слова: Рим, імперська ідеологія, пропаганда, Середній Схід, Парфія, I ст. до н. е.

**Парфяне – достойный враг Рима? Ремарки
о римско-парфянском политическом конфликте в I в. до н. э.
и его влиянии на римскую имперскую идеологию**

Х. Л. Крюкевич

Как показала история, иногда сущность неудачи наилучшим образом проявляется в последствиях события. В случае Парфянского государства вышеупомянутый закон также, кажется, находит свое подтверждение. В данной статье мы исследуем тему внешних связей Римской империи с монархией Арсакидов (Парфянская империя) в I в. до нашей эры. В работе рассматриваются первые дипломатические столкновения двух могучих держав, а также вопрос их военных столкновений в этот период. Начиная с обстоятельств первого официального посольства между Л. Корнелиусом Суллой и парфянским эмиссаром Оробазосом (первое десятилетие I в. до н. э.) и рассматривая далее поражение легионов М. Красса в битве при Каррах (53 г. до н. э.), собственные планы Юлия Цезаря по проведению парфянской кампании (45–44 гг. до н. э.), восточную экспедицию Марка Антония (36 г. до н. э.) и успех императора Августа в возвращении утраченных штандартов легионов (20 г. до н. э.), в работе основное внимание уделяется формированию образа Парфянской державы, как и истокам тогдашнего стереотипного восприятия парфян в римской имперской идеологии, как результата вышеупомянутых исторических событий. Какое влияние имело поражение Красса на римскую военную элиту и *populus Romanus* того времени? Где лежат глубинные причины всего римско-парфянского конфликта?

Ключевые слова: Рим, имперская идеология, пропаганда, Средний Восток, Парфия, I в. до н. э.

Стаття надійшла до редакції 07.06.2017