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Consequences of the Battle of Satala (298)

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Abstract: *The priority for the Sasanid rulers was to eliminate from the throne of Armenia, the Parthian Arsacid dynasty, linked by blood ties to the formerly abolished Iranian ruling dynasty. In 298, the Battle of Satala took place in Armenia, in which the Roman army commanded by Caesar Galerius won a crushing victory over the Sassanian troops headed by King Narseh. The Romans captured huge amounts of booty and captured the Persian royal family. The campaign ended with a peace treaty very favourable to Rome, in which Narseh renounced Trans-Tigritania, pledged non-intervention in Armenia, and recognised the Roman protectorate in Iberia. The revision of the so-called Treaty of Nisibis was the foundation of the Persian-Roman wars in the 4th century carried out by Shapur II. In this study, it is aimed to give information about the effect of the Battle of Satala on the beginning of the Persian-Roman wars in the 4th century and its results.*

Key words: Sasanians, Iran, Rome, Armenia, Wars, Satala, Narseh, Diocletian, Nisibis, Shapur II, Peace Treaty

Introduction

The strongest bastion of resistance against the Sasanian dynasty was Armenia, whose kings were tied with the Arsacid rulers by blood.[1] After the battle on the plain of Hormzdagān (224), in defense of the Parthian royal house stood the Arsacids of Armenia, the Parthian clan of Kārin, and the countries of Media Atropatene, Albania, and Iberia.[2] Armenia was conquered by the Sasanian forces only in 252/253,[3] and Shapur I (242-272) gave the title of *wuzurg šāh Arminān* to Hormizd-Ardashir, his eldest son.[4] In order to prevent a Roman intervention in support of

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[1] Dąbrowa, 2018: 77-80.
[2] Cass. Dio 80.3.3; Zonar. 12.15; Agathangelos 1.19; Moses Khorenatsʿi 2.71.
[3] Disscusion in Hartmann, 2006: 106, note 5.
[4] ŠKZ 23/18/41: Ohrmezd Ardašīr vuzurg šāh Arminān/ Ohrmezd Ardašīr vuzurg šāh Arminīn / Ὡρμισδαρταξιρ τοῦ μεγάλου βασιλέως Ἀρμενίας 'Hormizd-Ardashir, great king of Armenia'.

the Arsacids in Armenia, Shapur attacked Syria and Cappadocia. The military actions of the Persian army consisted of three individual actions: the attack on Syria in 253, the attack on Cappadocia in 253, and the attack on Dura and Circesium in 256.[5] In 260, the direct clash of the Persian king with the Emperor ended with the defeat of Valerian (253-260) in the battle of Edessa.[6] Shapur I with his victorious campaigns against Rome, not only secured Sasanian power in Armenia, but strengthened its influence in the lands of the Caucasus.[7] In the late 3rd century CE, the restoration of influence in Armenia became a priority in the eastern policy of the Roman empire. In 283, Roman emperor Carus (282-283) conquered Ctesiphon,[8] but this success was annulled by the victory of Sasanian king Wahram II (276-293) in northern Mesopotamia.[9]

In 290, emperor Diocletian (284-305) was to introduce Trdat of the Arsacid dynasty to the Armenian throne.[10] This situation would lead to weakening of the position of the *šāh Arminān* Narseh (272-293) the youngest son of Shapur I, who ruled Persarmenia (*Armenia Maior*) after his father's death.[11] Although Agathangelos testified that the Sasanians were forced out of Armenia,[12] however, following the great Paikuli inscription describing the events of 293 it must be assumed that Narseh retained the power.[13]

The coronation of Wahram III in 293, which, against established rules of succession resulted in the mutiny of the aristocracy in course of which the power in Ērānšahr took over Narseh (293-302).[14] What's interesting, the Paikuli inscription names the Roman emperor in the list of the rulers sending regards to the new Sasanian king.[15]

The Battle of Satala

In 296, taking advantage of Diocletian's engagement in Egypt, *šāhān šāh* Narseh attacked Roman Armenia and Syria.[16] The army dispatched against him, commanded by *caesar* Galerius, was crushed by the Iranian forces between Carrhae

[5] Kettenhofen, 1982: 79-83; Mosig-Walburg, 2009: 43-44.
[6] ŠKZ 14-15/11/24-25; Eutr. 9.7; Fest. 23; Lactant. *De mort. pers*. 7.13; Goltz & Hartmann, 2008.
[7] The king of Iberia is mentioned in the ŠKZ 31/25/60: (H)amāzāsp Wiruzān šāh / (H)amāzāsp Wiržān šāh / Ἀμαζάσπου τοῦ βασιλέως τῆς Ἰβηρίας 'Hamazāsp, king of Georgia'; Stickler, 2021.
[8] Eutr. 9.18; Fest. 24; Moses Khorenatsʿi 2.79; Winter, 1988: 130-137.
[9] Felix, 1985: 100-102.
[10] Moses Khorenatsʿi 2.82; Agathangelos 3.18; Winter, 1988: 141-142; see Kettenhofen, 1995: 48-55.
[11] The date cannot be precisely specified, when Narseh became King of the Armenians; Weber, 2012: 153; Cereti, 2021: 69-70.
[12] Agathangelos 3.21.
[13] Kettenhofen, 2008: 484-490; Weber & Wiesehöfer, 2010: 103-105.
[14] Agath. 4.24. 6-8. Weber, 2010: 353-394; Cereti, 2021: 71-72.
[15] NPi 3.1, sec. 91, pārsīg: APn kysly W hlwm'|[dyk?] PWN l'pyklyhy W 'št|[yhy] W 'lmy YKOY[M]WN[d]; pahlav: […] | W 'štpy W šyrkmkpy | HQAYMWnt 'and Caesar and the Romans were in gratitude (?) and peace and friendship with me'.
[16] Amm. Marc. 23.5.11; Eutr. 9.22; Moses Khorenatsʿi 2.79-82; Zonar. 12.31; on the aims of Narseh see Jackson Bonner, 2020: 62.

and Callinicum.[17] The Narseh's army then retreated to the southwest border of Armenia.[18] Diocletian went to Antioch in 298,[19] at the same time ordering Galerius to call up frontier troops from Dacia, Illyricum and Moesia, and, presumably, mustering also a Gothic contingent.[20] Once the Romans had regrouped, Diocletian with the core of the army moved from Syria to northern Mesopotamia, while the newly recruited army under command of Galerius headed for Satala, the garrison town on the Cappadocian region limes. The maneuver aimed in launching an attack on Mesopotamia from the north. Galerius' army unexpectedly encountered Narseh's camp at Osḫa in the Basean region, not far from Satala.[21] The Roman sources do not describe the course of the battle in detail, being limited to information about seizing the harem and the royal treasury, a great victory, and inglorious escape of Narseh. The account in Festus' *Breviarium* is an exception here.

> "Arriving in Greater Armenia, the commander himself, along with two cavalrymen, reconnoitred the enemy. He suddenly came upon the enemy camp with twenty five thousand troops and, attacking the countless columns of the Persians, he cut them down in a massacre." (Fest. 25; trans. M.H. Dodgeon)

A description of the actions of Galerius is provided by the Armenian text:

> "He left his own army around the city of Satał and personally selected two leading wise men from the Armenian army, namely Aršawir and Andovk … And so, disguised as a peasant selling cabbages, the emperor went in person together with them into the Persian camp. As the camp of the Persian king was pitched in the district of Basean in the village called Osχay, they went and entered into it, observed, examined, and reckoned the size and strength of its forces and returned from it to their own camp, prepared and made ready. [Then] they marched forth and found the camp of the Persian king pitched in the very same place in idle, unconcerned, and unwary tranquility. They attacked the Persian king at daybreak, put the entire camp to the sword, and left not a single man alive. They sacked and pillaged the camp and captured the king's wives, the [chief] queen [*bambišn*], and the ladies accompanying them, together with their furnishings and possessions, and took into captivity their women, treasures, provisions, and supplies. But the king alone managed to escape…" (the *Epic Histories* 3.21; trans. N. Garsoïan)

[17] Oros. 7.25.9; Eutr. 9.24; Aur. Vict. *Caes.* 39.33-34.
[18] Amm. Marc. 23.5.11.
[19] Malal. 13.6.
[20] Fest. 25; Eutr. 9.25; Jord. *Get*. 21; Oros. 7.25.9-11.
[21] the *Epic Histories* 3.21; Aur. Vict. *Caes*. 39.34; Eutr. 9.25; Lactant. *De mort. pers*. 9.6; Zuckerman, 1993; Leadbetter, 2002; Mosig-Walburg, 2009: 91-121; Maksymiuk, 2015: 48-49.

Taking into consideration the above accounts, it can be assumed that the Armenian *naxarars*, who provided intelligence information, played a major role in Galerius' success, but it is not possible to reconstruct the actual course of the battle.

The Peace of 298

> "After he had recovered from his wound, Narses sent delegations to Diocletian and Gallerius, asking that his children and wives be returned to him and that a peace treaty be made". (Zonar. 12.31; trans. T. Banchich & E. Lane)

The terms of the treaty (called the Treaty of Nisibis)[22] was a result of peace negotiations which were led from the Iranian side by *hazāruft* Affarbān, the commander of elite forces and Diocletian's *magister memoriae*, Sicorius Probus.[23] According to summary of its content by Peter the Patrician, Narseh withdrew from Armenia and renounced his claim to the *Trans-Tigritania* and established Roman protectorate in Iberia.[24]

> "The main points of the ambassador's message were the following: that in the eastern region the Romans should receive Ingilēnē together with Sōphēnē,[25] Arzanēnē together with Karduēnē and Zabdikēnē and that the river Tigris should be the boundary line between the two states, that the fortress of Zintha, which was located on the border of Media, should mark the border of Armenia, that the king of Ibēria should owe his royal status to the Romans, and that the city of Nisibis, which lies on the Tigris, should be the place of trade." (Petrus Patricius, frag. 14; trans. B. Dignas & E. Winter).

The *Trans-Tigritania* to be administered and ruled by the Armenian *naxarar*s, whose loyalty towards the Empire was attested. "But influence over these lands gave Rome control over the approach to the Tigris River through the Anti-Taurus Mountain range, as well as access to the Bitlis Pass, and mastery of the great plain of Tur-ʿAbdin."[26]

In addition to territorial changes, an economically crucial decision was taken regarding Nisibis. Diocletian enforced a clause in the treaty under which Nisibis was to be the only place of commercial exchange between the two states.[27]

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[22] According to Petrus Patricius (frag. 14) the peace was concluded near the Asproudis, a river in Media.
[23] Blockley, 1984: 29-36; Winter, 1989: 555-571.
[24] Petrus Patricius, frag. 13-14; Amm. Marc. 25.7.9; Winter, 1988, 152-215; Dignas & Winter, 2007: 122-130; Mosig-Walburg, 2009: 122-157; on the diverging accounts of Peter the Patrician and Festus (14.25) and on the territorial clauses see Dignas & Winter, 2007: 126-128.
[25] Yildirim, 2016.
[26] Jackson Bonner, 2020: 64.
[27] Winter, 1988: 192-199.

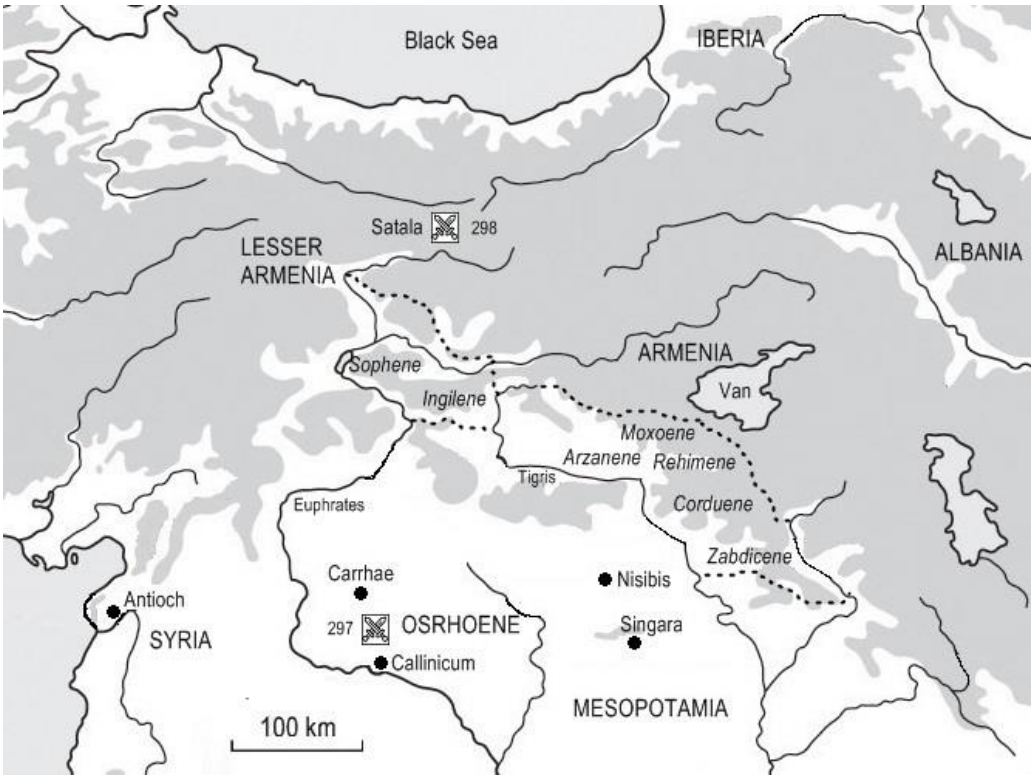

Fig. 1. Territorial changes due to the treaty of 298 (drawing by K. Maksymiuk)

The Sasanian-Roman wars of 337-363

The terms of the treaty of 298 had been greatly to Ērānšahr's disadvantage, and the Sasanian King would not long endure Roman influence over the northern Mesopotamia, Armenia, and Iberia. Adoption of Christianity in Armenia by Trdat during the early years of Shapur II's (309-379), and the Constantine's (306-337) religious policies resulted in tighten the teis the kingdom with Rome.[28]

Probably c. 336, Shapur intervened in Armenia and succeeded in capturing Armenian King.[29] In 337, the Shapur's army invaded north Mesopotamia. Even though they defeated the Roman army in the vicinity of Singara (in 344 and 348) twice, despite several attempts Shapur was not able to achieve the main goal of his expedition, namely Nisibis (in 337, 346, 350), which still remained under the Roman control.[30]

[28] Euseb. *Hist. eccl*. 9.8.2-4; Sozom. *Hist. eccl*. 2.8.1; Moses Khorenatsʿi 3.5; Kettenhofen, 2002: 45-104; Jackson Bonner, 2017: 97-98.
[29] the *Epic Histories* 3.20; but Shapur agreed to the release of the royal family in 338.
[30] Maksymiuk, 2018 with further references.

The invasion of nomadic invaders from Central Asia forced Shapur to pay attention to the East.[31] The sudden break in the military operations in Mesopotamia in 350, and Shapur's agreement to enthrone Arshak II (c. 350-364) in Armenia, show how serious a threat this was.[32] Warfare with Rome was resumed in the spring of the year 359. Unexpectedly for the Roman army, Shapur attacked Amida.[33] The city was captured after a 73-day siege, on October 4, 359.[34] In the next year, Shapur captured two more Roman strongholds, Singara and Bezabde.[35]

The Persian expedition of Julian the Apostate (361-363) proved of utmost importance to the balance of power at the Sasanian-Roman border. After the conquest of strongholds in the southern Mesopotamia, the Roman army reached the walls of Ctesiphon, they were not able to capture the city itself.[36] The campaign finished with the emperor's death in the battle of Toummara on June 26, 363.[37]

The Peace of 363

Shapur dictated the terms of *ignobili decreto* (shameful treaty)[38] to the new emperor.[39] According to the treaty, Jovian (363-364) renounced his rights to the *Trans-Tigritania*, including Singara, Castra Maurorum, Nisibis and fifteen other fortresses. This suggests that the river Nymphios was the border between the Roman and Sasanian empires. The treaty demanded the withdrawal of Rome's backing for Armenian rulers.[40]

> "Now the king ... required as our ransom five provinces on the far side of the Tigris: Arzanena, Moxoëna, and Zabdicena, as well as Rehimena and Corduena with fifteen fortresses, besides Nisibis, Singara and Castra Maurorum … To these conditions there was added … that … Arsaces, our steadfast and faithful friend should never, if he asked it, be given help against the Persians." (Amm. Marc. 25.7.9-12; trans. J.C. Rolfe)

[31] Amm. Marc. 14.3.1; 16.9.3; Jackson Bonner, 2017; While uncertain, it is possible that this was referring to the ruling clan of the Huns – Kidarites, a part of the Chionite tribes, see Payne, 2015: 284; Rezakhani, 2017: 87-93.
[32] Howard-Johnston, 2010: 41-43.
[33] Amm. Marc. 18.8.1.
[34] Amm. Marc. 18.9.1-4; 19.1.1-9.9; Yildirim, 2012; Farrokh, Maksymiuk & Sánchez Gracia, 2018.
[35] Amm. Marc. 20.6.1-9; 20.7.1-15; Maksymiuk, 2018.
[36] Amm. Marc. 24.7.1-8.7; Zos. 3.25.5-7; Mosig-Walburg, 2009: 283-304, 76-105; Woods, 2020.
[37] Amm. Marc. 25.3.1-8; Zos. 3.29.1-4; *contra* Ṭabarī 842.
[38] Amm. Marc., 25.7.13.
[39] The Roman negotiators were Arintheus and Salutius, two officers among Jovian's senior staff (Amm. Marc. 25.7.7). Shapur's ambassador was a commander of Iranian army – a member of the Surēn clan (Amm. Marc. 25.7.5).
[40] Amm. Marc. 25.7.9; 24.7.12; Fest. 29; Zos. 3.31.1-2; Eutr. 10.17; Blockley, 1984: 34-37; Seager, 1996; Dignas & Winter, 2007: 131-134; Mosig-Walburg, 2009: 305-324.

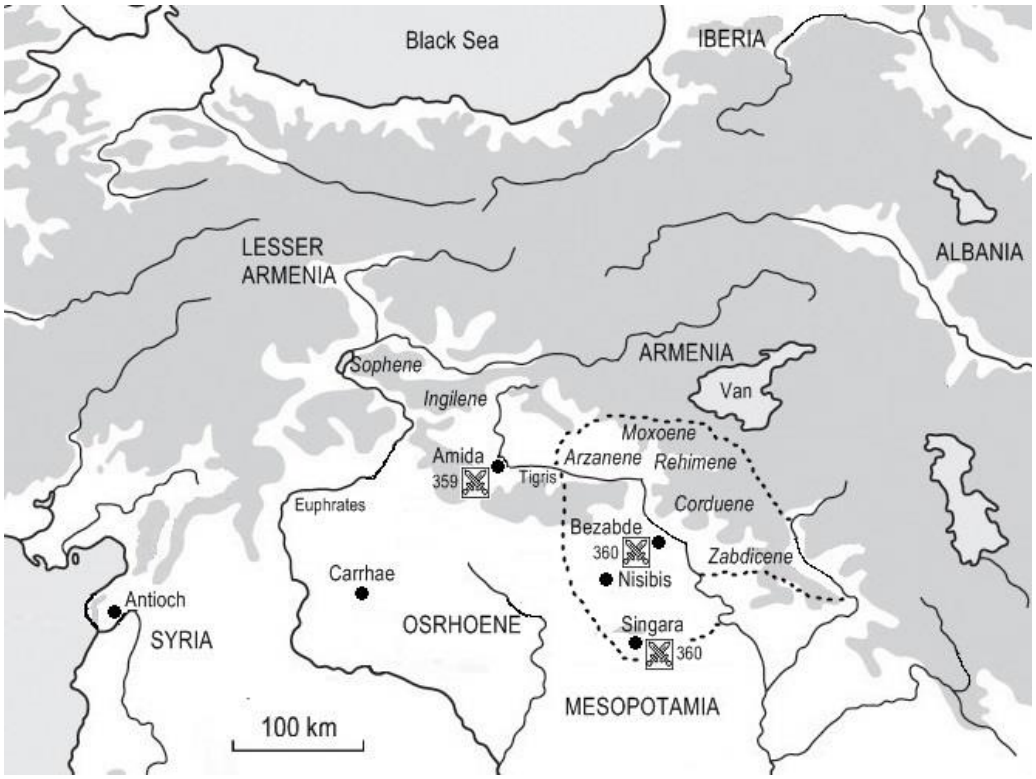

Fig. 2. Territorial changes due to the treaty of 363 (drawing by K. Maksymiuk)

Although Shapur took Nisibis, its residents were allowed to leave the city. The inhabitants of Singara were treated similarly.[41] According to Ammianus Marcellinus the treaty of 363 was supposed to last for 30 years,[42] but Joshua the Stylite wrote that the Persians would take possession of Nisibis for 120 years.[43] Admittedly Shapur did not reconquer all the lands lost according to the the provisions of the peace treaty of 298, but the acquisition of four-fifths of the South Caucasus into the Iranian sphere of influence gave it a clear strategic advantage.

Conclusions

Roman propaganda greatly publicized the triumph over the Sasanian empire near Satala. All four members of the Tetrarchy were awarded the epithet of *Persicus*

[41] Amm. Marc. 25.7.11.
[42] Amm. Marc. 25.7.14.
[43] Yeshu'Stylite 7; and Yeshu'Stylite 18: "The taxes of Nisibis which you receive are enough for you, which for many years past have been due to the Romans" (trans. W. Wright) ; on the financial regulations in the Roman-Persian relations, see Maksymiuk, 2016.

Maximus,[44] and Galerius erected a monumental arch in Thessaloniki.[45] For the Romans the capture of Narseh's family was the revenge for the capture of Valerian.[46] In reality, of key importance were the provisions regarding the *Trans-Tigritania* and Armenia. It was a high priority of the Sasanian monarch in their Westward activities to eradicate the Arsacid dynasty in Armenia. The provisions of the 'Treaty of Nisibis' were greatly disadvantageous for Iran and the Sasanian court would not long endure Roman influence over Mesopotamia, Armenia, and Iberia. The stipulations of the treaty were providing constant impulse for western wars of Shapur II. It needs to be emphasized that only the division of Armenia between Iran and Rome at the end of the 4th century CE[47] and imminent threat of Hunnic raids and invasions over the Caucasus Mountains,[48] resulted in Ērānšahr suspending the western expansion and the frontier remained stable for another century. In the 363 peace made between the Persians and Rome, the arrival of the Huns and their possible military campaigns were effective.

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[44] CIL 3 824 (= ILS 642); CIL 3 6979 (= ILS 660).
[45] Dignas & Winter 2007: 85-88.
[46] Petrus Patricius, frag. 13.
[47] See Greatrex, 2000.
[48] Jackson Bonner, 2020: 94-102.

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