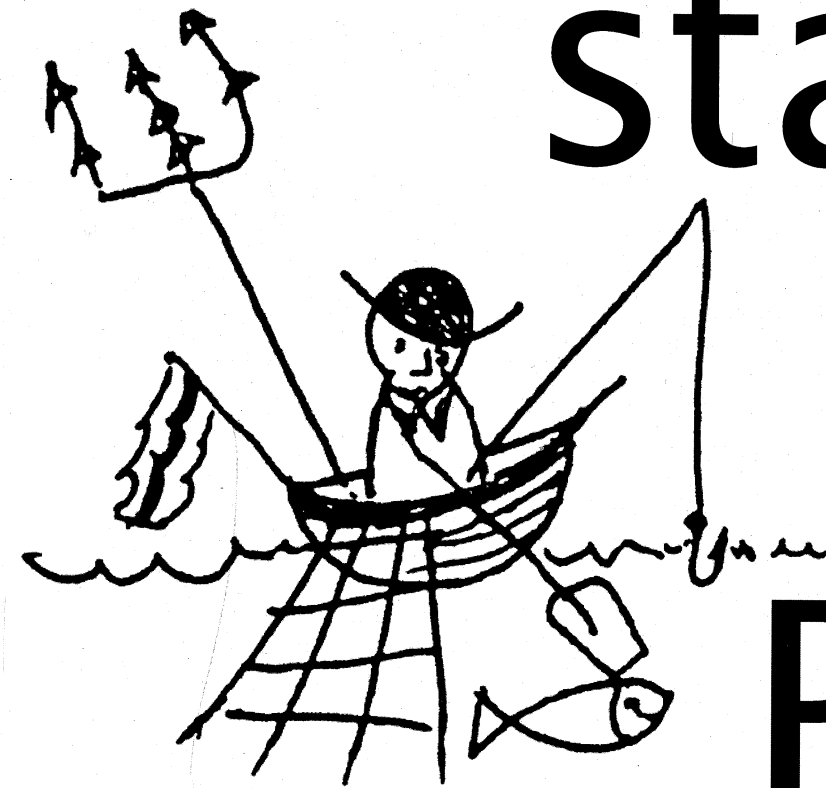


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Under stand ing the Past

Papers offered to Stefan K. Kozłowski

edited by
Jan Michał Burdukiewicz,
Krzysztof Cyrek,
Piotr Dyczek
and Karol Szymczak

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Professor Stefan Karol Kozłowski at the Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński University

Preface

In his *Bioi kai gnōmai tōn en filosoφία eūdokimhōntōn* (5,1,18) Diogenes Laertios reported Aristotle as saying: “The roots of knowledge are bitter, but the fruit sweet.” It is as if he had in mind the scholarly life of our friend and associate, Stefan Karol Kozłowski. “Bitter” were the difficult years of his study at university in the 1950s and 1960s, when despite the difficulties he shaped his own, unique, scientific profile. But “sweet” the fruits of that effort – now when he looks back at a lifetime of achievement, the results of his work, his many students, now outstanding scholars in their own right...

From the start he had two scholarly fascinations – the European Mesolithic and the Neolithic in the Near East. Both are reflected in countless studies, books and articles. Yet it should be kept in mind that many of his general works on prehistory are now considered a foundation of our knowledge of the prehistory of Poland. They are not only prominent and innovative as works of science, but they are an inexhaustible and still informative source for the younger generations of archaeologists. It will not be too bold to say that somewhere along the way Stefan Karol Kozłowski established his own scientific school.

Two aspects of this school merit special emphasis. On the one hand, it is an in-depth and well-conceived analysis of artifacts and cultural change, on the other an open and clear presentation of results which are intelligible not only to a narrow group of dedicated specialists, but also to archaeologists of other specialties. Iron logic, clear conclusions, well formulated research objectives – this is what makes his works so popular and current despite passing time and new discoveries.

Academic lecturing has always occupied a special space in his life. The number of students as well as the number of listeners at his lectures, always interesting and intriguing, an eye for new talent, a fatherly – severe but understanding – attitude to his students have come to fruit in the scholarly works

of a new generation of researchers and in grateful memory of their Teacher and Master.

Last but not least, there is his deep involvement in administration, as deputy dean of the Faculty of History of the University of Warsaw, deputy director of the University's Institute of Archaeology, since 1976 president of the Mesolithic Commission of the International Union of Pre- and Protohistoric Research, head of a chair at the Stefan Wyszyński University, and many others. His conscientious exercise of duties has ensured him the sympathy and gratitude of those at the receiving end. Ever responsible, open to new ideas, effective in action, for this he has been trusted and respected, and for this he deserves a deep-felt appreciation.

An archaeologist without fieldwork is not fulfilled and in this Stefan Karol Kozłowski has also been successful. But it was no mere accident of fate. Without his intuition and persistence, the spectacular results of his field research, whether in Poland or Iraq, would never have been possible. Those results are reflected in a number of publications, already considered among the classics of archaeological research.

Another of his talents is his ability to form disciplined teams of research associates. Always surrounded by young researchers in archaeology, he always shares with them his knowledge and experience before expecting scholarly independence and results. Always ready to help, he will promote the most talented, while keeping himself in the shade. It is his duty, he will say, abhorring any struggle for personal appreciation of his efforts. All the better that others see and appreciate his achievements in the scholarly field, his election to the membership of the Polish Academy of Arts and Sciences being the best proof of this.

This volume is another expression of our thanks, a symbol of appreciation by many scholars who have benefited from his teachings and from discussions with him.

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A Persian Response. The Organization of Defence in Mesopotamia under the Parthians and Sasanians

KRZYSZTOF JAKUBIAK

The main aim of this text is an attempt to analyze how the border zone between both supreme powers of Persia and Rome was functioning, particularly taking into consideration the Persian point of view. The history of conflicts between Persia and Rome is commonly known, both from ancient sources, and from modern scholars' analysis, so I decided to omit the historical background, but political events and historical process should be kept in mind.

According to the historical sources and testimonies we have in our disposal some information about important cities or towns in northern Mesopotamia which were playing crucial role in every conflict in that region. Edessa, Nisibis, Dara, and Singara with no doubt were belonging to the most important cities in the region.

The cities were the most important and strategic points in the region, eastwards from the Khabur River, and for a long time were in any case of invasion main defensive points. Northern Mesopotamia was a terrain without small and fortified towns or even posts controlled and protected main routes along the border zone. In Ammianus Marcellinus testimony (*Rerum gestarum libri*), for instance, who described Julian's expedition against Persians in 362, we can find several fortified towns and fortresses: Anatha (XXIV 1.6; 1.12), Tiulta (*Thilutha*) (XXIV 2.1), Achaiachala (XXIV 2.2), Diakira (*Diaciria*) (XXIV 2.3), Ozogardana, the city where a tribune of Trajan was erected (XXIV 2.3), Pirisabora – a fortified city under the command of Mamersydes (XXIV 2, 2.9, 5.3), Maozamlacha, which probably was located on suburbs of Ctesiphon (XXIV 4, 4.2; XXV 8.18), Hukumbra (*Hucumbra*) – unfortified land property where Julian's army had a rest for two days (XXV 1.4), Sumer – a fortification on the Tigris (XXV 6.4), Dura – a city on the Tigris (XXV 6.9), and fortified city of Ur with many storages of food supplies (XXV 8.7). These cities and other sites were besieged and most of them were

finally captured by Roman troops. The main target in that war, similar to the earlier and later conflicts with Persia, was still Ctesiphon.

Since the capital city of Mesopotamia was very often threatened by enemies' attacks, a question arises how the city was protected and how the defensive system of Persian Mesopotamia was organized. If such a system here was functioning, a question is legitimate: what part of Mesopotamia could be effectively protected?

Taking into consideration that our knowledge on Mesopotamia in Parthian and Sasanian periods is relatively inadequate, the study on the settlement density, and particularly on development of defensive systems is rather difficult, but in my opinion not impossible. How problematic is searching for such evidence, clearly shows scanty information we have in our disposal to understand properly the Ctesiphon fortifications (Ruther, 1929; Fiey, 1967; Kröger, 1982). Moreover, when analyzing the Ctesiphon fortifications, it should not be forgotten that in Ctesiphon the area was grounded by not only one city. Ctesiphon was a part of much bigger metropolis which later created one of the biggest agglomerations in the Middle East.

Consequently, other cities and suburbs belonged to that part of agglomeration. That huge urban structure was situated on both banks of the Tigris river, and included, besides Ctesiphon, Seleucia on the Tigris, Veh Ardashir (Koche), Port of Vologesias (Vologesocerta), Better Antioch grounded by Khosrow in ca. 540 A.D., or a small fortified settlement on Tell Dahab, which was situated south-east of Veh Ardashir – Ctesiphon-Koche (Schmidt, 1934; Kröger, 1982: 40–43). Certainly, some of the mentioned cities were grounded at different periods, but anyway they established a part of agglomeration. However, it cannot be forgotten that Ctesiphon was actually grounded two times. The city from the Parthian period was almost totally replaced by new Ctesiphon (Veh Ardashir) estab-

lished by Ardashir I about 230 A.D. (Kröger, 2008). The old Ctesiphon was located north of the new one. Recently, ruins of the Parthian city have been cut by course of the Tigris.

The agglomeration localization and its strategic and defensive significance need to be firstly discussed, because the area of Ctesiphon was probably the most important part of the Parthian and Sasanian Mesopotamia. The localization on the so called Baghdad isthmus was perfectly chosen. On the western bank of the Tigris since Seleucid period the position of Seleucia clearly indicates how Seleukos I well understood the strategic significance of the region (Hadley, 1978; Invernizzi, 1994). The importance of the area was doubled in the Parthian period when Mitrydates I on the opposite side of the Tigris grounded Ctesiphon. According to the testimony of Strabo (16.1.16), Parthian troops could not enter the Greek city; consequently there was a need of a new city on the eastern bank of the river.

Moreover, such location made possible to control a relatively important road into the Jebel Hamrin direction running along the Diyala valley. The result of McAdams' survey clearly showed how densely the Diyala region was inhabited (McAdams, 1965: 61–68). Besides small villages, small and medium towns can be found, which indicates that the region was definitely a natural economic hinterland of Seleucia/Ctesiphon. Some of them for sure had their own defensive structures. It gives an assumption that along the Diyala River was located defensive system of cities which ran east of Ctesiphon, up to the hilly region of Jebel Hamrin. In other words, even if Seleucia on the western bank of the Tigris could be besieged, Diyala still remained under Persian control as far as Jebel Hamrin and the Zagros mountains. That gave a possibility of safe communication with central Persian territories situated behind the mountains. The whole Seleucia/Ctesiphon agglomeration controlled both sides of the Tigris but the isthmus, located nearby. The localization of Seleucia/Ctesiphon was the key in the Mesopotamian defensive strategy. A breaking through and capturing of so called Al-Mada'in (Ctesiphon/Seleucia) metropolis could open a way to the southern Mesopotamia. It seems to be seductive theory that a settlement network with some fortified towns could also be a part of the Mesopotamian defensive system. The core of the system was formed in the vicinity of Ctesiphon (McAdams, 1965: 61–83). (The cities or towns like Karastel which was identified with ancient Artemita, Abu Jilal; large towns: Tell Amleh, Tell Al Dimi, Tell Umm al Tarish, Tell Jima,

Tell Salama, Tulul Midr Rumaili, Abu Suqa, Tulul Bawi, and several others unnamed known only under the nomenclature numbers [53, 218, 300]).

There were also small towns which also could have been protected by defensive walls (McAdams, 1965: 135–166). Here the following sites should be listed: Tulul Hmoidat, Tell Qubba, Tulul al Jiffaf, Tell Tayan, Tulul Derbanji, Tulul Waldayah, Tulul Midr Mehaisin, 'Alwat Husajchan, Tell Abu Tuyur, Medar, Lamele, Tell Serajj, Tulul Midr Salmak, Tell Muwailih, Abu Yebisa, Tulul Midr Be'ayir, Tell al Hewaish, Tell Abu Dali, Tell Thahab and Tell Abu Saybah.

Most of the numbered, especially small towns, were localized in the Ctesiphon hinterland, and for sure were a part of big economic structure supplying Ctesiphon. The towns protected the vicinity of the capital against direct and unexpected attack. Moreover, in case of a direct threat, but not a permanent siege, the city could be supplied directly from the east. That is why, from the strategic point of view, the most important were these cities and fortified towns which functioned in the middle course of the Diyala River. The towns such as Tell Saad, Tell Abu Idregh, Tell Mujailia, Karastel (Artemita), Abu Jilal, and others were crucial, and protected Ctesiphon because they controlled roads between the Tigris and the Diyala River.

The only weak element of the southern Mesopotamia defense seems to be a region along the Euphrates. We have not got any evidence which could be helpful for better understanding the social, economic and strategic organization of that area. It seems to be justified, however, to propose some archaeological sites which could be elements of the Mesopotamian defensive strategy. According to Isidore of Charax (Schoff, 1914) our attention should be focused on the sites located south of Anata (Anatho), a fortified island on the Euphrates. He mentioned the following sites: Thilabus – another island on the Euphrates, where a treasure of the Parthians was deposited, Izan (modern Bidjan island), Aeipolis (the city of Is) which probably could be identified with modern Hit. In Aeipolis were bituminous springs, similar as in Hit. Besides Aeipolis, a city named Besechana is mentioned, where a temple dedicated to Atargatis was functioning. Then appeared a city Neapolis by the Euphrates, and Macepracta mentioned by Ammianus Marcellinus. Roman troops could recognize partly disintegrated ancient ruins of Macepracta's city walls, where a large canal Naarmalcha (the Royal Canal) started to run reaching up to Seleucia on the Tigris

and Ctesiphon (Amm. Marc. XXIV, 2, 6–8; moreover the Naarmalcha canal is mentioned by Ammianus Marcellinus later in: XXIV, 6, 1–3) (Gawlikowski, 1988; Paschoud, 1978). The Naarmalcha canal had functioned several centuries before Roman invasions. During Roman campaigns against the Persian the strategic significance of the water route was perfectly understood by Roman troops using the canal for army and supply transportation up to the Tigris River. Consequently the strategic localization of Ctesiphon could be strongly questioned, taking into consideration the possibility of easy access to the heart and keystone of the Mesopotamian defensive system. Here a question arises, why Ctesiphon still was functioning as the capital city. The attacks leading via the Naarmalcha canal could reach the city easily.

Because the distance between Neapolis and Seleucia was only 9 schoeni (around 50 km), possibly fortified city of Neapolis by the Euphrates needed to be localized near so called Baghdad isthmus. The localization of the Neapolis was probably so important because the city controlled a strategic way along the canal leading to the heart of central Mesopotamia. The whole distance between Zeugma and Seleucia given by Isidore of Charax is equal to 171 schoeni (940.5 km) (Gawlikowski, 1987, 1988). If the assumption that Neapolis by the Euphrates was the last defensive element on the Euphrates, the vision of Parthians and Sasanians defensive strategy seems to be clearer and more understandable. Because the region west of Seleucia on the Tigris, and the region adjacent to the Euphrates were never well surveyed, they remain not well recognized. Those circumstances make almost impossible to reconstruct fully the archaeological settlement's pattern and its role in the defensive system of Mesopotamia.

In our disposal we have only the results of researches conducted by Finster and Schmidt mostly along the western banks of the Euphrates (Finster and Schmidt, 1976). The Sasanian power was focused relatively late on the region. Several fortified sites appeared during the late Sasanian period between modern towns Ramadi and Kufa. Actually only two forts recognized here should be taken into consideration: Dab'a (Finster and Schmidt, 1976: 47–49), and Qusair (Finster and Schmidt, 1976: 49–54). Obviously these forts were used also after the Arab conquest during the Umajjad period, but, anyway, the origins of these fortifications were deeply rooted in Sasanian times. Their construction seems to be a reflection of the political situation. The forts Dab'a and Qusair were probably erected

for the protection of south-western part of Mesopotamia against Arabs. A nomadic threat materialized here during the 6th century A.D. In my opinion, the localization of the forts on the western banks of the Euphrates clearly shows a strategic configuration, where Ctesiphon was the main element of the defensive system of Mesopotamia. Additionally, the defensive system protecting central Mesopotamia was extended along the eastern part of the Diyala River. Because the vast territory west of the Euphrates was mostly a deserted area without any economic and strategic significance, it seemed to be relatively good solution to keep the enemy forces far away back from the Euphrates. Terrain east of the river formed fertile land of central and southern Mesopotamia. The protection of the south-western part of the isthmus was a relatively late conception, strongly associated with political events that appeared in the late Antiquity, when Arab tribes, formerly allied with Persia, became a new enemy, threatening the vital part of Mesopotamia (Butcher, 2003: 70–78).

The question still arises, why the isthmus was so important for the protection of southern Mesopotamia. For many years the border between Roman Empire and Parthian, and then Sasanian states was set along the Euphrates, as far as the Taurus Mountains which run in east-west direction.

At a first glance, it seems to be very easy to answer the question. The northern Mesopotamia was a buffer region, and both sides tried to extend their influence on the region. Moreover, there were two organisms: Osrhoene and Adiabene, which played a crucial role in the defensive policy of both imperial powers (Kennedy and Riley, 1990). The third so called buffer organism – a city of Hatra – cannot be omitted (Drijvers, 1977: figure 7). The supremacist power which was able to control Adiabene, Osrhoene, and Hatra could have kept not only supremacy on the northern Mesopotamia, but also strategic domination in that part of the Middle East. The significance of northern Mesopotamia control had been visible when Anastasius ordered to construct a fortress Dara just nearby Nisibis, controlled by Persians (Butcher, 2003: 69–70). It was a clear provocation and break of an agreement signed in a treaty between Theodosius II and Bahram V in 422 (Butcher, 2003: 70). According to the treaty, both sides promised not to build any more fortresses in the frontier region. Consequently, it was not surprising that the construction of a new fortress in Dara caused tension between Persia and Rome.

The situation in the northern part of Mesopotamia, anyway, was not particularly clear and stable since the times of Trajan's expedition against Parthia. The province Mesopotamia was designed by Trajan as the easternmost limit of the Roman Empire. Even if the personal decision of Hadrian forced Roman army to retreat back in the west of the Euphrates River, the region remained still a crucial and strategic territory, and had never been omitted in the Roman eastern strategy till 363 A.D., when they finally lost their interest in controlling the northern Mesopotamia (Ball, 2007: 24–26).

It seems to be legitimate to focus our discussion on the explanation how the strategic defensive system of northern Mesopotamia looked like. Without analyzing the strategic situation in that region it would be difficult to understand properly the organization of the defense in the central part of Mesopotamia. The most important was Hatra and its strategic localization. The results of the survey conducted by Ibrahim in the vicinity of Hatra showed relatively big density of settlement localized in the Hatran state (Ibrahim, 1986: 43–88). Most of it were remnants of small settlement with no military significance. Nevertheless, there were distinguished several so called urban centers. These relatively large cities, no doubt fortified, created both the settlement and defensive network of Hatra. All of them were located along small *wadi* which runs from the east and joins the main Wadi Tartar's bed. During the Parthian period such sites as: Qalat Shirqat – former Assur (Andrae and Lenzen, 1933), Tell 'Airij, Tell Tamri, and Tulul Sukariyat flourished and were probably important for the city of Hatra (Ibrahim, 1986: 55–56). Entire abandonment of these sub-urban centers was associated with the collapse of Hatra. This process shows how closely this system was associated with the capital city functioning, and its fortune.

Relatively different seems to be arrangement of the northern Hatran territories. Remains of several forts recognized during the survey seemed to be a part of the Hatran defensive system protecting the road approaching the capital city. In our disposal now we have only remains of the following forts: Khirbet Zazia, Khirbet Bashmaneh, Khirbet Al Naddas, Khirbet Qbr Ibn Naif, and Khirbet Jaddalah (Ibrahim, 1986: 49, 53, 87, 88, 112–144, 141–169, 194). The strategic localization of these forts could have been a part of the defensive system even if Khirbet Jaddalah and Khirbet Qbr Ibn Naif were originally fortified residences of Hatran noblemen. Both of them were grounded almost in

the same period. Khirdeth Jadallah, according to an inscription found on the site, was grounded in 141/142 A.D., and Khirbet Qbr Ibn Naif was a bit older because its construction was dated to 137/138 A.D. (Ibrahim, 1986: 86).

The fortifications near the northern border of the Hatran territories seem to protect not only a border itself but could be an answer to the strategic role of the route controlled by Osrhoene and Adiabene running along the line connecting Carrhae or Nicephorim on the Euphrates, via Alaina, Singara, Zagurrae (Ain Sinu), Ad Pontem (Tell Afar), Abdeae, Ad Flumen Tigrim to Ardabil (Arbela), the capital of Adiabene (Oats, 1968, 1956). Consequently, during the Parthian period when both buffer states Osrhoene and Adiabene were under strong Roman influence, the protection of the border terrains of Hatra, which was in the Parthian orbit of influence, seems to be crucial from the strategic point of view. The areas west and north-west of Wadi Tartar and Hatra are literally desert region, and even the settlement pattern of the Hatran colonization was relatively rare. Consequently, any attack seemed to be impossible from that vast and deserted area. The only possibility was an attack directly from the north. That is why a control on the river valley and the most important island site Ana seemed to be crucial for Hatra's protection, as well as for the central Mesopotamia and Ctesiphon. That strategic position confirmed the excavations conducted during the Haditha Salvage Project which took place in the mid-eighties. The fieldworks carried on Kifrin (Becufayn? – Invernizzi, 1983, 1986a, b; Valtz, 1987; Gregory, 1995), and Bijan (Izan?) (Gawlikowski, 1983, 1986) proved the importance of the Euphrates River north of the modern Hit (Aeipolis).

The Euphrates valley nearby Kifrin was very important during the Sasanian period. An interesting situation is observed on the northern border zone of the former Hatran state. Both states, Osrhoene and Adiabene, during the early Sasanian times remained under strong Roman influence. Consequently, Sasanian doctrine of defense seemed to have been partly constructed on earlier, post-Hatran fortifications. In the times just after incorporation of Hatran state into the Sasanian Empire, forts in Khirbet Zazia, Khirbet Bashmaneh, and Khirbet Al Naddas still functioned. Possibly on the other bank of *wadi* just opposite to Khirbet Jadallah there was newly established fort known as Tell Unuq Jadallah.

The northern Mesopotamia region was controlled till 363 A.D. by two supreme powers: Per-

sians and Romans. Strategic situation of Sasanian Persia in Mesopotamia after the Romans retreat from the northern Mesopotamia was radically improved. That event gave Persians military control on such cities as Nisibis and Singara belonging to the most important and strategic cities of that part of the Middle East. Nevertheless, another question arises: whether the strategic localization of Ctesiphon and other cities being a part of the Ctesiphon metropolis was still important and significant in strategic policy and defensive strategy? In other words, the question remains, if Diyala in the Sasanian period was still an important element of a defensive strategy? Moreover, it is necessary to ask, why Ctesiphon in spite of its location threat by Roman campaign still was a capital city of the Persian Empire? Evidently, the location which was strategically justified, needed to be supported by additional smaller and larger forts' and towns' network.

The results of the McAdams's survey showed with no doubts that during the Sasanian period in the Diyala region the settlement network density reached an apogee (McAdams, 1965: 69–83). The most important city was still Ctesiphon. Moreover, other cities in the region need to be mentioned, taking into consideration their strategic position (McAdams, 1965: 72). In the middle Diyala we have in our disposal at least four large towns, but all of them were distinguished on the unnamed tells, consequently only their numbers: 167, 219, 250 and 467, can be given. In other words, altogether at least 13 big cities, or large towns were situated in the Diyala river vicinity. All of them seem to create relatively effective defensive system which could protect fertile and wealthy southern Mesopotamia. Moreover, among these big fortified cities and regional town centers were some interpreted as small towns. If these sites are properly interpreted, each of them should have had its enclosure walls. In the upper part of the Diyala valley some other small towns of the sites were functioning (McAdams, 1965: 135–166).

It seems possible that similar settlement density should have been formed between the Tigris and the Euphrates, but till now no reliable survey was conducted and finally published. West of the Euphrates, several fortified constructions were erected in the late Sasanian period. Such a solution was provoked by political events in that region. The Arab tribes were not friendly to the Sasanian throne anymore, consequently, it seems that better protection of the Ctesiphon agglomeration from the west was strongly needed. Moreover, forts Dab'a and Qusair effectively closed the defensive line which started

in the upper Diyala region (south-west of Jebel Hamrin). Altogether they formed a kind of *limes*, or fortified cities which protected southern Mesopotamia against the direct attacks of Romans, and then Byzantines. In other words, the thesis presented by Dillemann, who suggested that in Mesopotamia did not exist any *limes* frontier, seems to be still accepted, but in my opinion only for the northern part of Mesopotamia (Dillemann, 1962: 195–240). In central Mesopotamia some elements of an effective defensive system, which can be called *limes*, can be detected. The question still remains, if the system was the effect of the strategic conception developed during the Parthian and Sasanian periods, or was it a result of gradual developing of the settlement network and its strategic significance, which appeared accidentally and unexpectedly? The settlement network was strictly associated with changes of the landscape, and changes of the Diyala river watercourse (Nüzel, 2004: 154–156). Such a situation involved creation of several new settlements which needed to take over a strategic importance of former cities and towns. The system, even if it was formed by accident, could be, and probably was used for the protection of the south. Only Trajan expedition was able to reach southern limits of Mesopotamia, the rest of struggles in Mesopotamia were focused on the central Mesopotamia, and no military forces were able to cross the Diyala–Ctesiphon line. The factors mentioned above, in my opinion, show Ctesiphon and its localization as the key point in the defensive lines. Of course, the rank and the function of Ctesiphon, as one of the capital cities of Persian Empire, made the city very special, but the strategic position and the most significant and effective localization of the city should be taken into consideration.

The strategic position of Ctesiphon provokes a question, why its localization was so important, and, moreover, what was the reason to keep so tightly the capital and its defense on the Baghdad isthmus? It seems to be surprising that even in such good times for the Parthian State, after Dura Europos capturing, which took place in late 2nd century B.C., until the 160 A.D., when it was recaptured by Roman troops, they did not change their strategy (Millar, 1998: 474). During this time border line was based on the Euphrates. Even this political factor did not involve any improvements of the defensive system. All the time the forts and fortified cities functioned in the Parthian, and later Sasanian territory, as single strongholds controlling important roads leading to the central Mesopotamia.

A similar problem was also visible when the northern Mesopotamia just after the Trajans Mesopotamian campaign had been changed into a Roman province. Of course, the province functioned for a relatively short period, but the most striking is why Parthians did not even try to re-conquest those lands. Probably they accepted such political situation, which in a further perspective was a good policy, since the Romans finally retreated from their territory. Similar situation repeated once more after 363 A.D., when Romans finally lost their interest in strategic protection of the northern Mesopotamia. That political factor immediately provoked Persian control on the abounded territory, and opened strategic control. Moreover, it opened a way to penetration and potential raids on northern Syria after 502 A.D., when a new conflict started again (Bullough, 1963).

The terrain situated farther to the south, i.e. the area around Ctesiphon, as well as the Diyala River need to be analyzed in a historical and economical context. Since the Early Bronze Age here and in the neighboring terrains flourished very intensively a settlement network where several large cities functioned, for instance Khafadja, Tell Asmar or Tell Agrab (Hout, 1990: 60–73). During that early time the discussed region with no doubt played an important role in the Mesopotamian economy. The localization of cities, towns and settlement along the route leading to Jebel Hamrin seemed to be a significant factor.

It is possible that the strategic, and consequently military significance was not so important during these periods including Early Iron Age when direct military confrontation between Assyria and Babylonia, and even Elam was taking place. But on the other hand, there were two routes which served for Assyrian troops as strategic ways leading to southern Mesopotamia. The first one via Wadi Tartar, chosen in 824 B.C. by Assyrians, was described as a difficult route (Barnett, 1963: 22). The other possibility, much more effective and frequently used, was the route via the city called Turnat. This route was leading along eastern banks of the Tigris River because marching along western banks was impossible. Similar information can be found in Polibius (V.51.6) testimony. He described the march of Antioch III to relieve Seleucia in 220 B.C. Similar situation was probably during the Achaemenid period when the so called Royal Route was running into the Kermanshah direction via Behistun, and consequently forming the shortest way from Babylon to Ecbatana (Hammadan, see Briant, 2002: 357–358).

According to Diodotus (XIX. 19.2), the journey from Susa to Ecbatana via Babylonia lasted 40 days.

The almost only information which we have in our disposal, describing military activity, can be found in *Anabasis* by Arrian (Arr. Anab. 3: 6–7). He mentioned Alexander's activity along the Zagros Mountains. A better supply of the army and the march organization in much better, mild climate was no doubt a significant element of Alexander's strategy. The route chosen by Alexander and his troops was not an accidental maneuver. Alexander, before he started his campaign against the Achaemenid Empire, probably had to know all the sources describing the East. Consequently he had to know the text of *Anabasis* written by Xenophon. "The way of 10 000" was describing a route along the eastern banks of the Tigris river, from Opis to Nineveh, i.e. from the south to the north. It means that the Greek army needed to cross the Diyala River. According to Xenophon, north of the river Physkos (Diyala) they crossed almost uninhabited land, and marched through so called *Media* (*Exped. Cyr.* II 4, 1–7, 10–25, 27–128). Alexander chose the same route but in opposite direction. Such a decision shows his good reconnaissance and knowledge of sources describing the area of conflict with Persians.

The route along the Zagros Mountains was used several times as a strategic way leading to the heart of Babylonia, but only bravery ride conducted by Alexander stayed in minds. The deeds of Alexander could have had strong but indirect influence on the consolidation, and enforced the settlement network of the Diyala River during the Parthian and Sasanian periods.

During the Parthian and Sasanian domination the route along the Zagros Mountains still led to the southern Mesopotamia. Supposedly, the defensive system along this route became much more developed. In the times of Roman and Persian confrontation, a defensive line was not only based on Diyala, and on the so called Baghdad's isthmus, but was shifted farther to the north, and was associated with Hatra. In other words, here can be distinguished much more sophisticated system which consisted of two main defensive elements. The first possible impact would have been focused on Hatra itself, and bounded potential enemies just near the northern borders. The second line was functioning along the Diyala River, and could have been the second line of defence, and aimed to keep further march of enemy troops out of the heart of southern Mesopotamia. Here, one coincidence is striking

– the Hatran leader since 176 A.D. has been titled as a king, which possibly changed his position, and made him one of the independent rulers, similar to those of Characene or Elymais (Hauser, 1998: 499–503). That, with no doubt, political gesture had very strong repercussions. On the one hand, the state of Hatra stood face to face with the Roman threat, and became a buffer space in case of any invasion from the north. On the other hand, Hatra still stayed independent that implicated strong and fast development and reinforced Hatra. As we can find in the ancient sources, during the Trajans times, the city was a small and not so important (Gawlikowski, 1994: 147–184). Later Hatra became very rich and mighty city, which became a keystone in the Parthian defensive system. That is why during the Septimus Severus invasion and his double attempt of the siege of Hatra (Cassius Dio, LXVIII, 31, 1–2), the Roman troops had to fight in completely different military environment. In other words, Hatra became the first frontier which had to bind the Roman military forces, as far as it was possible from the heartland of Mesopotamia. Consequently, the next line of the possible defense became the Baghdad's isthmus, and the Diyala valley east of Ctesiphon. The system of the southern Mesopotamia fertile lands protection still existed, even during the times of Sasanians, when Hatra was defeated, and its prosperity was parallel to the Sasanian conquest (McAdams, 1981: 175–214, 253–294). It is very important that no other Roman expedition, except for the campaign conducted by Trajan, reached the fertile regions of the southern Mesopotamia. All the activity focused on Ctesiphon and its vicinity, which might be explained as the limit of the Roman interests. The confrontations far away beyond the Roman borders in relatively difficult and well prepared to defend terrain were so exhausting that even after the capture of Ctesiphon, the Roman army was too weak to consume the results of the success. The capturing of Ctesiphon by Julian's troop, for instance, took place in May or in June when in central Mesopotamia temperatures usually are high (Amm. Marc. XXIV, 6, 8–16; Dodgeon and Lieu, 1994: 235). Trajan and his army started to withdraw from Mesopotamia marching north in middle of June, along right banks of the Tigris, when the weather conditions became very difficult for Roman soldiers (Amm. Marc. XXIV, 8, 2–5, XXV, 1, 4; Dodgeon and Lieu, 1994: 236). Consequently, the barrier formed by Ctesiphon and Diyala functioned well and effectively, until the moment when other enemies appeared from the south-west.

Taking into consideration all above factors, there is still a question to be answered: why were Ctesiphon, and earlier Seleucia on the Tigris so important in spite of the attacks during conflicts with the Roman Empire?

The strategic localization of these big cities was not accidental. Since the origins of the urban civilization in Mesopotamia, which started in 4th millennium B.C., the most important cities were located in the vicinity of the isthmus between Euphrates and Tigris. Such big cities as Babylon, Borsippa, Kish and Nippur, Dur Kurigalzu, or even Baghdad were crucial for the region functioning. All of the mentioned cities played an important role in the trade and economy of Babylonia. Moreover, since the times when these cities started to flourish, they have controlled the whole irrigation system that watered lower Mesopotamia.

In other words, localization of large urban centers, particularly such important as capital cities: Seleucia on the Tigris, and Ctesiphon, could help control the extremely fertile terrains of lower Mesopotamia. That is why both powers: Romans and Persians, so dramatically fought each other for keeping control on the central part of Mesopotamia. In the place when Diyala flows into the Tigris, the Euphrates is in the closest distance to Ctesiphon. Here was a place where the irrigation system started. The strategic management of the water carried by the rivers Tigris, Euphrates, and Diyala could have been strongly controlled by Ctesiphon. In other words, who had a control on the northern part or Babylonia or Arabistan, as that part of Mesopotamia was called during the Sasanian times, he would keep the whole lower Mesopotamia in check. The control over water supplies could provoke complete devastation of the agricultural region, and cause the hunger. In such perspective, it seems to be understandable why so dramatically the Roman forces wanted to reach Ctesiphon. The only problem is that even if Ctesiphon was captured and turned in ruins, the control on the terrain was only temporary, and did not result in longer occupation, which could provoke the ecological and economical disaster in the southern part of Mesopotamia. If the thesis were acceptable, it could explain not only the strategic position of Ctesiphon, but also answer the question why so desperately Ctesiphon was defended and was under the siege so many times? Ctesiphon and the smaller cities in its vicinity not only controlled the irrigation system, but were also important from the economic point of view, because the main trade and strategic roads crossed

there. Taking into consideration all those factors, it could be possible that in face of every threat Persians could not do anything more than only try to hold off the enemy forced back from Ctesiphon and the area around the capital.

Concluding: the border between Roman Empire and Persia was not fixed, but was being rearranged during several serious conflicts. According to Isidore of Charax witness, the border in his times was based on the line Samosata–Zeugma, and Sura. South of this region all territories, and particularly the whole Euphrates valley, were controlled by Parthian Empire. Situation dramatically changed when Trajan expedition brought a new political factor which manifested with the northern Mesopotamia effective control. After fall of Dura Europos in 164 A.D., the Roman control on the Euphrates valley was pushed farther south and based on Kifrin and Bijan islands. Roman control on these southernmost posts finished around 252 A.D. when Sasanian army pushed Romans back to Syria.

Comparing two ancient sources, i.e. Isidore of Charax and Ammianus Marcellinus, on the first sight it is visible that military and strategic network density along the Euphrates dramatically changed. It shows that settlement pattern changed, and probably this process was a reflection of both military activity and defensive strategy development. The most important is that Romans between 40 B.C. and 252 A.D. were the most dynamic power, which manifested with strong military activity in Mesopotamia. This aggressive policy usually ended by the Ctesiphon city walls. In other words, the capital city always was a target for Roman troops. That is why passive defensive of the region was so important. Parthians were rather passive defenders in opposition to Sasanian dynasty. New established dynasty became much more dynamic, which involved new conflicts with Rome.

The last question still remains, why Parthians, and then Sasanians did not arrange the linear defensive system similar to those organized in the other parts of their territories. Large defensive systems based on the linear defensive walls, as the Gurgan wall, also called the Wall of Alexander (Kiani, 1982), or the wall of Merz (Grave, 1957) in the Central Asia, or other similar constructions known from the other parts of the Central Asia, clearly show that Persians perfectly knew how to protect even vast areas basing on the large military constructions. Even in Mesopotamia such constructions were also familiar. The last such construction built in Mesopotamia was so

called Median wall which was constructed by Babylonians against the Median threat from the north (Barnett, 1963; Killick, 1984). That is why it needs to be asked: why Persians (Parthians or Sasanians) did not use there any similar construction for protection of the most important part of Mesopotamia? The only answer seems to be adequate: such linear defensive systems were efficient in confrontation of the nomad tribes, or not well equipped and trained military forces. In conflict with well organized, disciplined and well commanded forces, such a linear system could have not been strong enough and efficient barrier. Consequently, relatively expensive defensive system could have been completely useless in case of any military action.

That is why the defensive system based on several large and well fortified cities or strongholds could have been much more effective and more appropriate from military point of view. Probably the most important were the strongholds and fortified cities controlling water distribution, and whole irrigation system of southern Mesopotamia. Even if such a system was not a product of the military genius, and even if the analyzed system ever existed, the settlement network of the central Mesopotamia finally formed a structure which can be described as a defensive system which effectively protected southern Mesopotamia against a direct Roman military activity and its consequences, i.e. devastation of the fertile, rich and densely settled area. Ctesiphon, anyway, all the time was crucial in the defensive system. That is why Ctesiphon as the capital city was a main target in confrontations with the Roman Empire.

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