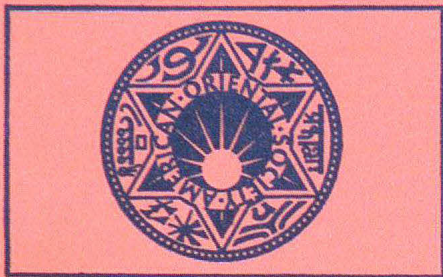


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PARTHIAN NIPPUR AND VOLOGASES' SOUTHERN STRATEGY: A HYPOTHESIS

E. J. KEALL

ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

It is hypothesized that the sudden but short-lived explosion of investment and building activity in Babylonia during the late Parthian period is reflected in a microcosm at Nippur. The impetus for the activity was Vologases I's desire to secure greater control over international trade by curbing the expansionist policies of Characene. Rome also had desires to control the trade and this was the main motive behind Trajan's invasion of Parthia in A.D. 116. Osroes of Elymais was awarded Babylonia as a fiefdom in return for his opposition to Trajan. After a brief period of prosperity following the peace settlement Nippur and Babylonia were abandoned by their garrisons when they were called to face the Romans again in Syria after A.D. 165.

HISTORIANS, COMMENTATORS, AND NUMISMATISTS are all agreed that the history of Mesopotamia and Iran during the Parthian period is extremely obscure on account of the lack of good written sources. In spite of this drawback there has been, during the past decade, a growth of interest in the period, largely generated by the discovery of monuments and the excavation of Parthian layers on archaeological sites in various parts of Mesopotamia and Iran. Although this archaeological

material has often been examined only as an overburden in the quest for earlier finds it has, nevertheless, provided a potential new source of information about the history of the Parthians.

But not infrequently the term "Parthian Empire" is a misnomer. Imperial control of Mesopotamia and Iran was little more than a veneer. Generally speaking Parthia was politically fragmented, and struggles for independence from Parthian suzerainty were the order of the day.

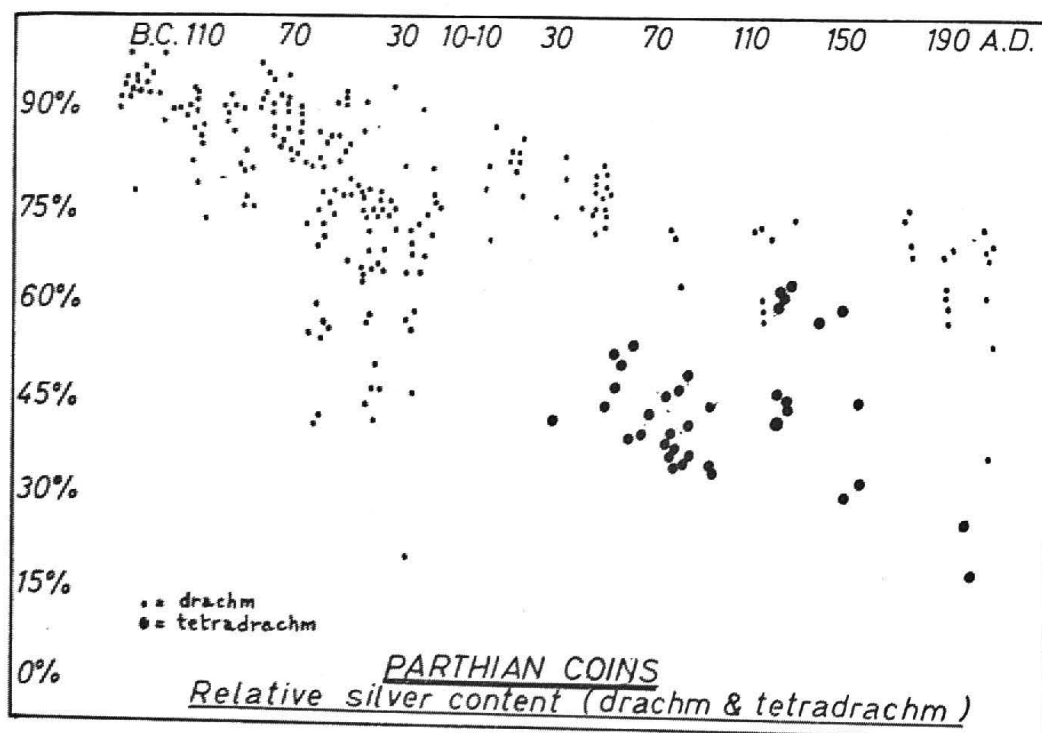


Fig. 1 Relative silver content of Parthian drachms and tetradrachms.

Consequently, as a result of the political instability, the constant changing of petty dynasties, and the apparent cultural differences between the various regions, it is very difficult to determine the exact course of Parthian history. With the scant sources that are available it can be very misleading if isolated incidents and phenomena are taken to be typical of the whole picture. Though it may be that each archaeological discovery will prove to be very typical of Parthian history in its own way, it is very important to be able to isolate the individual characteristics of the sites first before making the broad generalizations that are applicable to the history as a whole.

Excavations at Nippur have provided another source of information about Parthian history. In the light of the above remarks it would be extremely dangerous even to attempt an interpretation of the facts uncovered at Nippur. But it is apparent that many of the features that are so characteristic of Parthian Nippur are also common to other sites of the same time period in southern Mesopotamia, though not necessarily to those outside of that area. It may be profitable, therefore, to hypothesize that what can be seen to have happened at Nippur was typical of southern Mesopotamia, or at least Babylonia, during the first two centuries A.D. and that Parthian Nippur experienced a common history with the immediately adjacent regions during that time.

Late Parthian Nippur, then, and the region of Babylonia which it has been taken here to represent can be examined against the background of our present general knowledge of the rest of Parthia which is drawn from texts, coins, inscriptions and archaeology. During the time with which we are dealing (first two centuries A.D.) the predominant facts about historical events are derived mainly from Classical sources. The texts deal with Rome's numerous confrontations with Parthia on the battlefield and with the questions of policy and administration which these encounters raised.

Probably the best known event in Rome's dealings with Parthia is the defeat of Crassus in 53 B.C. which brought the Parthians instant fame for their military prowess. But they were unable to capitalize upon their success. Dynastic disputes and internal struggles for control of the Parthian throne made it possible for the Romans to return to threaten the borders of the Parthian Empire again. Traditionally these years have been dismissed by modern western historians as a time when the Parthian Empire was on the decline, a pathetic reminder of a great past.

There were indeed deep problems in the political and economic stability of the Parthian Empire. It became unsafe during the first century B.C. for caravans to travel through territory whose control was disputed by the two Great Powers. Trade

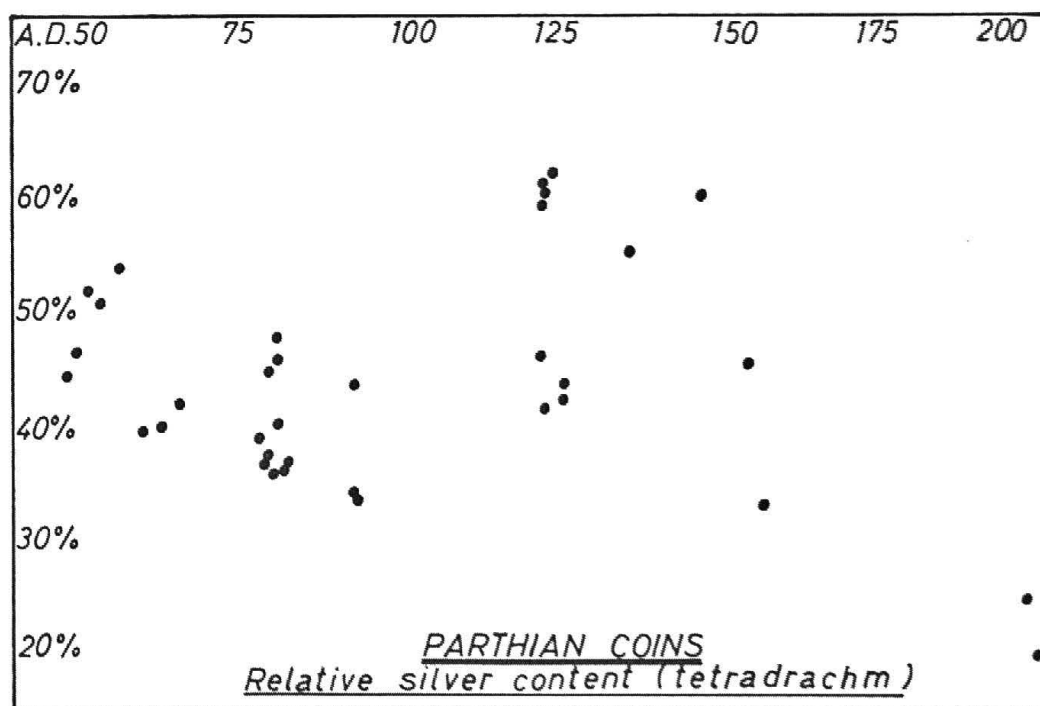


Fig. 2 Relative silver content of late Parthian tetradrachms.

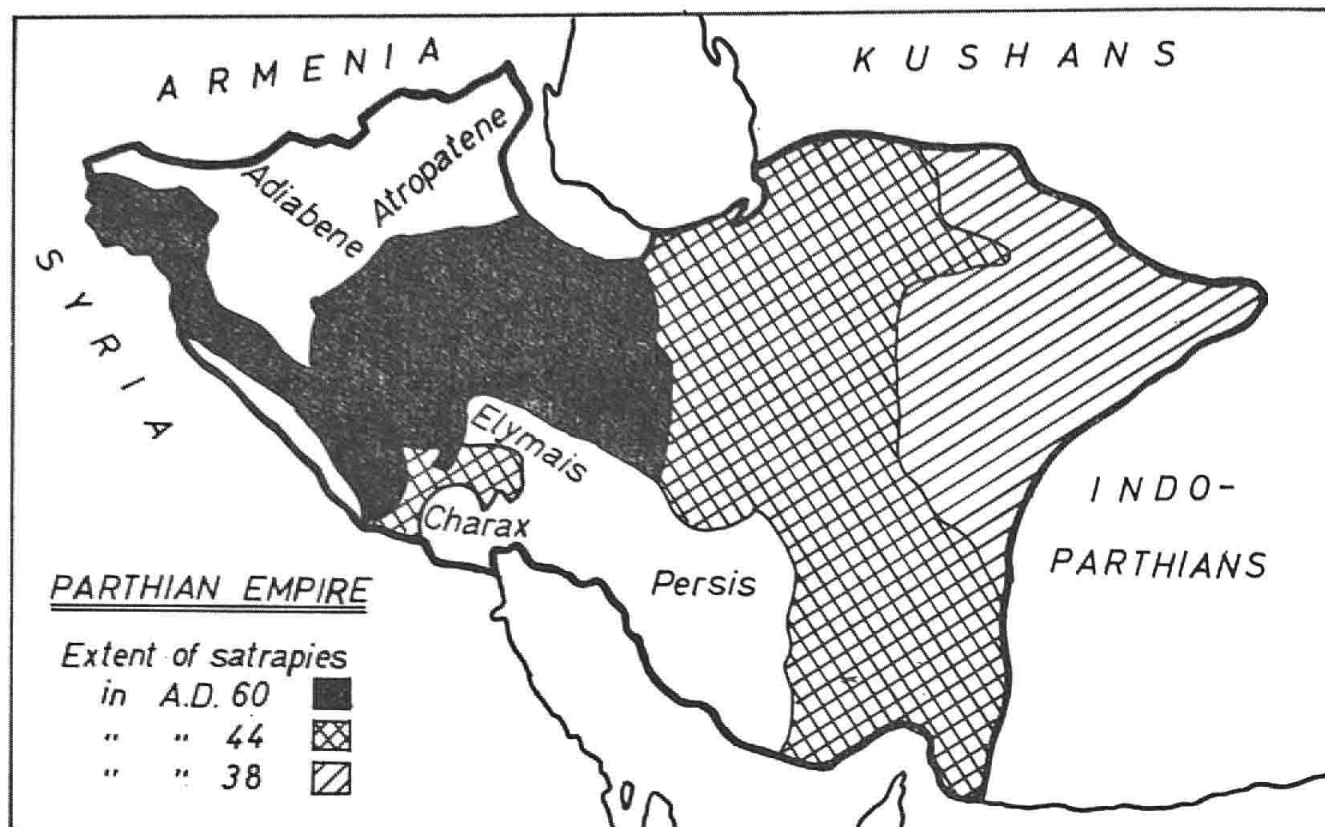


Fig. 3 Erosion of Parthian territory, 1st. Cent. A.D.

to the Mediterranean Coast was conducted along routes which by-passed the insecure reaches of Parthia. Disruption of the trade routes naturally caused a decline in the imperial economy. Economic problems are reflected in the consistent debasement of the currency.¹

Probably in order to maintain an army in the field against Rome and to bolster a faltering economy it was found necessary to issue more and more money. Debasement of the silver standard became the natural course to follow. There was a marked decline in the relative silver content of the Parthian drachm from around 95-90% silver purity in 123 B.C. to around 75-60% in 38 B.C.²

¹ The question of the debasement of Parthian coins was first dealt with in a systematic manner by Earle R. Caley, *Chemical Composition of Parthian Coins* (Numismatic Notes and Monographs, 129; American Numismatic Society, New York, 1955).

² In 1969 tests were conducted on a number of Parthian coins in the Department of Chemistry of the University of Michigan under the direction of Adon A. Gordus. The drachms tested form part of the "Princeton Hoard" collection which is now owned by the University of Michigan. The tests employed a "rapid, non-destructive method of neutron activation analysis of silver in coins," cf. A. A.

(fig. 1). There are obvious dangers in assuming too rapidly a correlation between a debased currency and a weak monarchy. Nevertheless the figures are too striking to be ignored.

A series of events narrated by Josephus serves as a clear indication of the weak control exercised by the Parthians over their Empire during the early first century A.D.³ The story reflects the unsettled conditions that had already become prev-

Gordus, "Non-Destructive Analysis of Parthian, Sasanian, and Umayyad Silver Coins," *Near Eastern Numismatics, Iconography, Epigraphy and History* (Studies in Honor of George C. Miles, ed. Dickran K. Kouymjian, American University of Beirut, 1973), 141-42. The information from these tests was utilized in this writer's unpublished doctoral dissertation, E. J. Keall, *The Significance of Late Parthian Nippur* (University Microfilms, Ann Arbor, 1970) 118-21. The tests essentially confirmed Caley's findings about the overall decline in the silver content of the coins. See graph, fig. 1.

³ Flavius Josephus, *Antiquitates Judaicae*: see H. St. J. Thackeray, *Josephus; Jewish Antiquities* (Loeb Classical Library, 1957), XVIII: 310-379. Josephus' account of the episode is summarized in Jacob Neusner, *A History of the Jews in Babylonia, I: The Parthian Period* (Studia Post Biblica, 9, Leiden, 1956), 51.

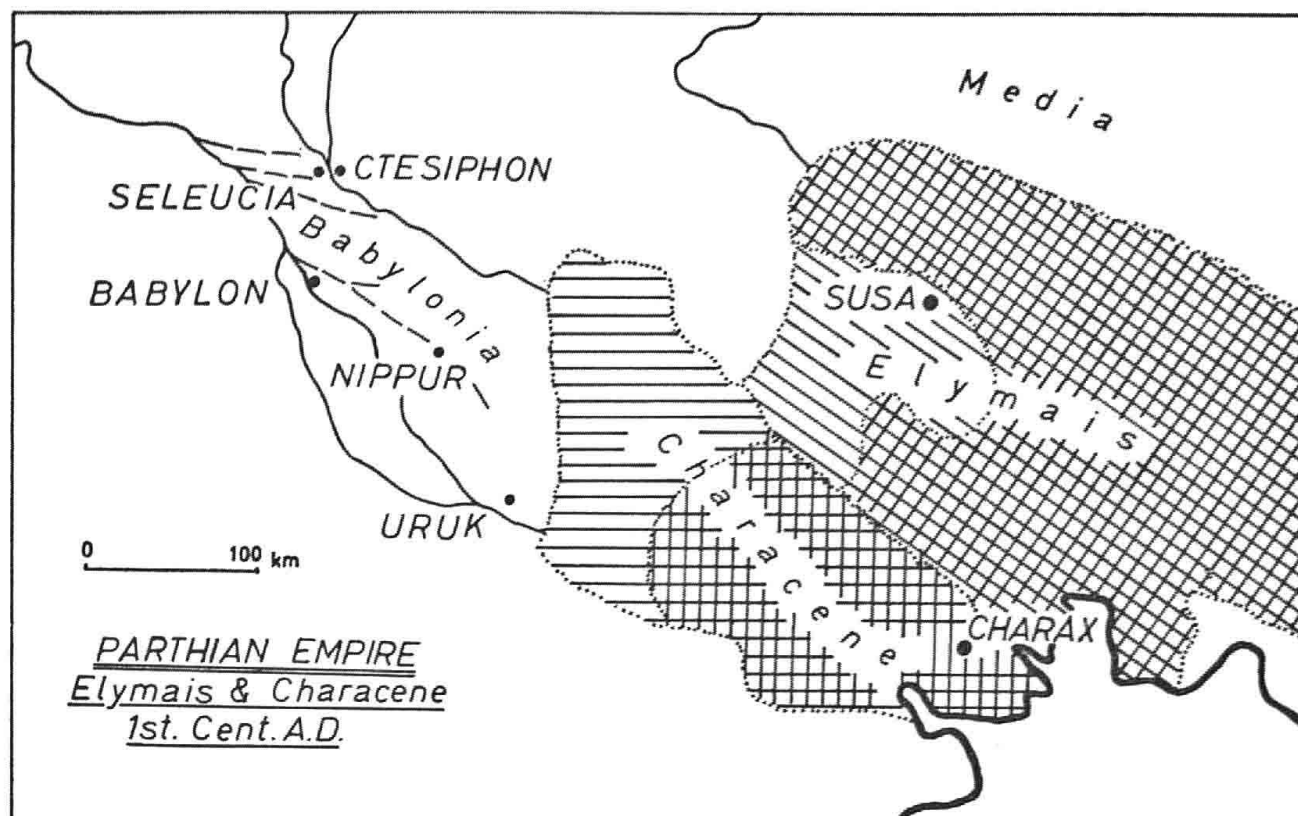


Fig. 4 Expansion of Elymais and Characene into Parthian territory, early 1st. Century A.D.

alent in Babylonia during the previous century. Josephus describes how Asinai and Anilai were brothers and apprenticed as weavers. Feeling that they had been mistreated by their master, they stole some weapons from him and ran away, setting up camp in the scrublands. They attracted a band of followers around them and operated a protection racket at the expense of the local farmers. News of their exploits reached official ears, but attempts to dislodge them were a failure. Artabanus, the Parthian king began to be afraid that the two brothers' success might infect the whole country. At this point he did the only sensible thing for a man in such a weak position—he resorted to diplomacy, summoned Asinai to court under a flag of truce, and placed the brothers in charge of the region's affairs. This expedient arrangement held good for fifteen years.

The brothers' governorship brought a superficial quiet to that part of Babylonia. Eventually, however, one of the brothers abused his powers. Several acts of indiscretion on the part of Anilai forced the king to move against him. Initially the royal forces had no more success than they had had during their first engagement. But when Anilai's indiscretions offended his own Jewish community it ceased to offer him refuge and the

king's agents were able to track him down and put an end to this interlude of local autonomy.

The very need for the brother's services reflects the Parthian neglect of Babylonia. Archaeological surveys have produced evidence to show that this area had remained partially deserted following its initial occupation by the Parthian army in the mid-second century B.C.⁴ It was into this vacuum created by Parthian neglect that the Characeni pushed their territorial claims northwards during the first century A.D.⁵ Such infringements upon

⁴ Robert McC. Adams and Hans J. Nissen, *The Uruk Countryside; the Natural Setting of Urban Societies* (Chicago, 1972), 57; and Hans J. Nissen, "Südbabylonien in parthischer und sasanidischer Zeit," *Baghdader Mitteilungen*, 6 (1973), 82.

⁵ The City of Charax which gave its name to the kingdom of Characene at the head of the Persian Gulf, had been founded by Alexander the Great as the port-city for his capital at Babylon. Hypsposines of Charax had been established there as *eparch* of the Seleucids in the mid-second century, B.C. With the decline of Seleucid authority Hypsposines found himself in a position of virtual independence, later declaring himself king. Mithridates II of Parthia reduced the kingdom of Characene to the state of a vassal kingdom, overstriking bronzes of

Parthian territory were beginning to reduce the amount of land controlled by the imperial government based in Ctesiphon, the Parthian capital. Between the time of Artabanus III and Vologases I (c. A.D. 38-60) the most dramatic erosion of territory occurred⁶ (figs. 3 and 4).

Vologases I appears to have taken drastic steps to put his empire in order. Feeling perhaps that the Empire was suffering from its inability to participate in international trade Vologases came to terms with the Romans over the Armenian question.⁷ This was after repeated trials of strength

Hyspaosines dated 121/20 B.C.; cf. E. T. Newell, *Mithridates of Parthia and Hyspaosines of Characene: a Numismatic Palimpsest* (Numismatic Notes and Monographs, 26, American Numismatic Society, New York, 1925), 1-18. With the subsequent inability of the Parthians to control the territory's affairs, the kingdom of Characene had been able to regain its former independent position. Sheldon A. Nodelman, "A Preliminary History of Characene," *Berytus*, 13 (1960), 83-121. Mediaeval writers referred to Characene as Mesene; cf. J. M. Fiey, *Assyrie Chrétienne III; Bêl Garmāi, Bêl Aramāyé, et Maisân Nestoriens* (Beirut Université Saint-Joseph, Institut de Lettres Orientales, Recherches, 42, Bêyrouth, 1968).

⁶ The phenomenon of the shrinking borders of the Parthian Empire has been well illustrated by Ulrich Kahrstedt, *Artabanos III. und seine Erben* (Dissertationes Bernenses, 1/ii, ed. A. Alföldi, Bern, 1950). See figs. 4 & 5.

⁷ This particular episode in the perpetual problem of

which had lasted for over a decade. Following the peace settlement in Armenia Vologases was free to turn his attention to matters concerning the economy.

It is surmised here that in order to foster trade from the Persian Gulf he proceeded to adopt what may be called his "southern strategy." A major target in this strategy was the kingdom of Characene. The Characeniens acted as agents in the business of transporting goods by caravan across the Syrian and Arabian deserts to western markets. Characeniens prosperity was originally closely linked with the fortunes of the Nabataean trading empire based at Petra (fig. 5). The Parthians had failed to take their fair share of the business, with the result that the economy had suffered, as already mentioned.

Initially the new policy was a success. By the year A.D. 73 the Characeniens had ceased to issue their own coins, apparently having had a Parthian

Armenia had started in A.D. 52 when Vologases put his own candidate, Tiridates, on the throne. Agreement was finally reached in A.D. 63 whereby Parthia undertook to abandon claims to Armenia in return for Rome's withdrawal back behind the Euphrates. Vologases' candidate for the throne, Tiridates, travelled to Rome and was formally crowned by Nero, a gesture that apparently satisfied both sides. On the Armenian war see J. G. C. Anderson, "The Eastern Frontier from Tiberius to Nero," *C.A.H.*, X/xxii, 743-780.

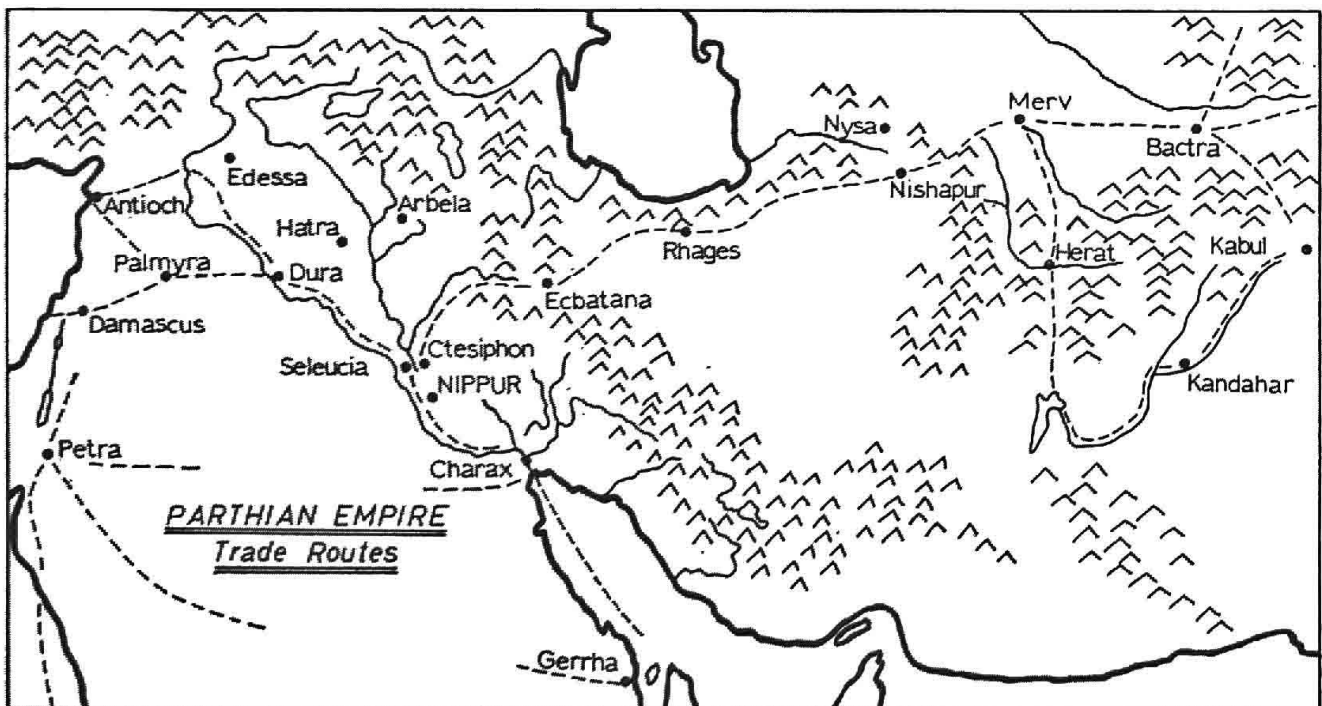


Fig. 5 Major trade routes of Parthian period, 1st.-2nd. Cents. A.D.

governor imposed upon them.⁸ The importance of this move is that it challenged the Characene monopoly in the Persian Gulf, at the same as removing pressure from the southern border of Parthia in Babylonia by halting Characene territorial expansion.

It is known that Vologases was also responsible for the foundation of a "new town", appropriately called Vologasias, not far from the existing Parthian capital.⁹ The city of Vologasias was probably founded in the late sixties. Pliny mentioned the city (as Vologescerta) in his *Natural History* which was published when Titus was in his sixth consulship, two years before the author's death which occurred in A.D. 77.¹⁰ Now already in the early seventies Vologases was having troubles with the borders of his empire. For instance in A.D. 75 he appealed to the Romans for help against the Alani who had made inroads onto the Caucasus.¹¹ The logical time for the beginning of the Vologasias project would have been following the settlement of the Armenian question with Rome in A.D. 63.

The action of founding the "new town" could be interpreted as an attempt to reduce the power of the Greeks of Seleucia-on-the-Tigris by re-

⁸ The coins of Attambelos III ceased to be issued in A.D. 73/74 and the Characene mint did not function again until A.D. 101/02. Referring to the year A.D. 97 the Hou-Han-Shu report notes that Characene was a vassal state under a Parthian military governor. The Hou-Han-Shu report in which the fact is recorded dates from the fifth century, but probably repeats the contents of earlier official reports. Hou-Han-Shu (Hsi-Yü-Chuan) 88; Nodelman, *Preliminary History*, 105; F. H. Hirth, *China and the Roman Orient: Researches into their Ancient and Mediaeval Relations as represented in Old Chinese Records* (1885, Paragon Book Reprint, New York, 1966), 38; E. Chavannes, "Les pays d'occident d'après les Heou han chou," *T'oung Pao*, 8 (1907), 178; and G. F. Hill, *Greek Coins of Arabia, Mesopotamia, and Persia* (British Museum Catalogue, 1922), cci-ccii.

⁹ Many proposals have been made for the exact site of the city's location. Maricq has put forward a fairly convincing argument that its position should be quite close to Seleucia-on-the-Tigris. André Maricq, "Vologasias, l'emporium de Ctésiphon," *Syria*, 36 (1959), 264-67.

¹⁰ Gaius Plinius Secundus, *Naturalis Historia*: see H. Rackham, *Pliny, Natural History* (Loeb Classical Library, 1942), VI: 30/122.

¹¹ Neilson C. Debevoise, *A Political History of Parthia* (Chicago, 1938), 201.

moving from their influence certain administrative procedures, particularly those dealing with matters of commerce and trade. The Greeks of Seleucia enjoyed a semi-autonomous position within the Empire and had prospered on account of the weakness of the monarchy. McDowell stresses more that the foundation of the city reflected an alliance between the royal government and the leading bankers and merchants, the "Greek aristocratic party," against the "native-popular party composed of "Babylonians" and other Aramaic-speaking peoples.¹² Neusner, on the other hand, claims that Vologases was trying to curb the powers of his own Parthian nobility, whose manipulation of state affairs had always been a course of embarrassment to the King of Kings.¹³ It is possible that there is an element of truth in each of these interpretations. A programme aimed at controlling the area south of the capital, and designed to reduce the vulnerability of the region to a minimum, both from an internal and external point of view, would have been made more effective by the administration of national affairs conducted outside of the influence of the Old City.

Vologases' "southern strategy" also provides the most logical explanation for the motive behind the building of a fortress at Nippur, an ancient city which like Uruk/Warka had remained virtually unoccupied during the first century and a half of Parthian rule. A temple did exist at Nippur in the early first century A.D. on the Citadel, the uppermost of a long series of temples dedicated to the goddess Inanna.¹⁴ It was the home of an archaic religious community, a remnant of what once had been one of the most important centres

¹² Robert H. McDowell, *Coins from Seleucia-on-the-Tigris* (University of Michigan Studies, Humanistic Series, 37, Ann Arbor, 1935), 229.

¹³ Neusner, *Babylonia*, 55.

¹⁴ This part of the site was designated "Temple Mound" by the first excavators in the nineteenth century and renamed "Religious Quarter" by the more recent expeditions. In a Parthian context it is more appropriate to refer to the same area as "Citadel." Work in the Inanna Temple began with soundings made initially by the First Joint Expedition to Nippur in 1948 by the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago and the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania. A plan of the Parthian version of the Inanna temple appeared in Vaughan E. Crawford, "Nippur the Holy City," *Archaeology*, 12 (1959), 74-84.

in all of Babylonia. A major change occurred when, probably sometime between the years A.D. 70 to 80, the ruined temple-enclosure of Enlil centered around the old ziggurat was re-used to provide an elevated platform for the construction of a fort.¹⁵ Excavations have shown that the fort underwent three distinct phases of growth. None of the plans reached completion before each was abandoned in favour of a more grandiose and ambitious programme of construction. The final and potentially the most impressive stage itself never reached fulfilment. After construction work on the building had stopped, the structures of the third and last phase were occupied for a few years before they were finally abandoned and the site became deserted, probably around the year A.D. 175.

The time span for the occupation of the three phases of the fortress suggested by the archaeological record coincides well with the known political fortunes of the Parthian Empire. The crucial date is the year A.D. 82/3 (395 S.E.). A bronze coin of that date, attributable to Pacorus II, was recovered from one of the upper floors of the Phase I fort.¹⁶ The fort was still unfinished at this time, but probably functioning as a fortified stronghold nonetheless. Reed houses were clustered together behind the partially finished compound wall. Since it is likely that the structure was designed to in-

¹⁵ Two seasons of work on the fort were conducted by the Ninth and Tenth Nippur Expeditions of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago in 1964-65 and 1966-67. Plans were published in James Knudstad, "A Preliminary Report on the 1966-67 Excavations at Nippur," *Sumer*, 24 (1968), 95-106. Slightly revised plans by Knudstad will be published in a forthcoming Oriental Institute publication by this writer.

¹⁶ E. J. Keall, "Historical Summary" in Knudstad, *Preliminary Report*, 105. The use of the Selucid Era as the basis for reading the dates on Parthian coins is undisputed. However there are differences of opinion regarding the initial month of the calendar. McDowell claimed that a Babylonia variation of the calendar was employed, calculated from the Spring of 311 B.C. rather than the traditional starting point for the Macedonian system in the Autumn of 312 B.C. It is more convenient to accept the argument put forward by Le Rider and calculate the dates according to the Macedonian calendar. McDowell, *Coins*, p. 150; and Georges Le Rider, *Suse sous les Séleucides et les Parthes: Les trouvailles monétaires de la ville* (Mission Archéologique en Iran, 38, Paris, 1965), 35.

timidate rather than act as a bastion against siege the presence of a garrison would have been sufficient to render the fort operational. Judging by the amount of earth moved to construct a platform to accommodate the fort above it must have been a lengthy project to build, involving a considerable outlay of money and manpower. It might be reasonable to hypothesize that the construction of the fort coincided with the foundation of Vologasias, and, that both actions were part of Vologases' "southern strategy." The unsettled conditions of the seventies may have caused suspension of the building activities at Nippur, with the fort continuing to be occupied in its unfinished state.

Renewal of activity at Nippur involving the Phase II fortress, must have occurred at least after A.D. 83, the date of the coin in the upper Phase I level. At the start of his reign the new king, Pacorus II, had had his own difficulties dealing with challenges to his supreme authority. It was not until the nineties that an appropriate moment seems to have occurred for the type of investment required for the construction of Phase II (fig. 6).

During the nineties there was considerable interest in many quarters in the Persian Gulf trade. For instance, in A.D. 97 a Chinese general Pan Tch'ao sent Kan Ying on a mission to reach Syria,¹⁷ presumably to examine at first hand the nature of the trade routes. Having reached Characene the Chinese mission was deterred from travelling further by tales of terrible hardships and horrors on the seas. Characene was still at this time ruled by a Parthian governor and it was natural that the Parthians should have tried to discourage outside interference in the trade. There is no suggestion here that Nippur was actually involved directly in the trade. Rather, an intensive programme of settlement in Babylonia was initiated, of which Nippur was just a small part, and by which the Parthians may have hoped to stabilize the South and protect their interests in the lucrative international trade.

Passing mention has already been made to the relative hiatus of settlement in the South during the last century and a half B.C. By contrast, in referring to the Uruk countryside during the first two centuries A.D., Adams speaks of a massive resettlement of sites. He states that this period "seems to have constituted the culminating epoch

¹⁷ Hirth, *China*, 39 and 165 and Nodelman, *Characene*, 106-7.

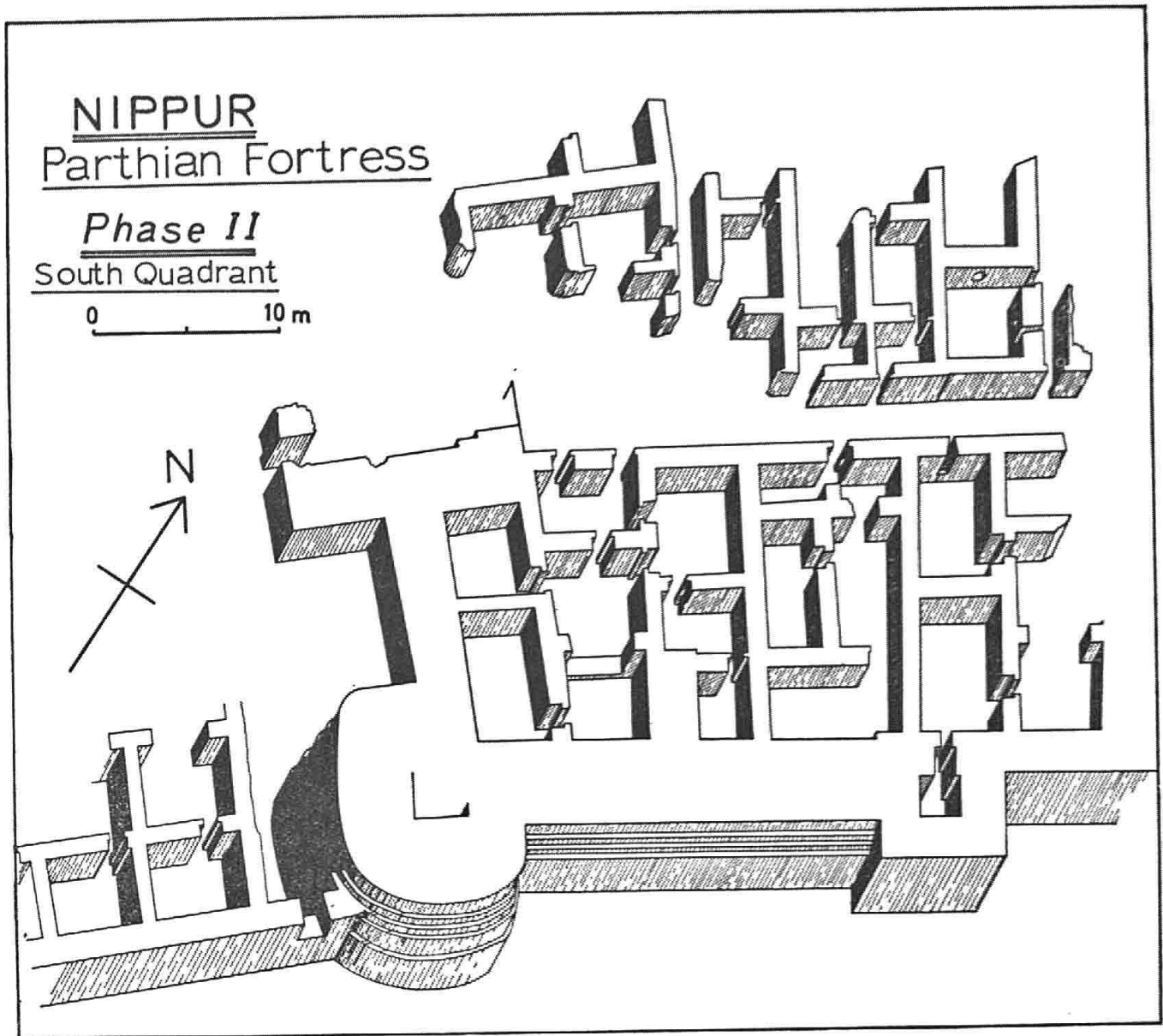


Fig. 6 Isometric projection of Nippur Parthian Fortress, Phase II South Quadrant, early 2nd Century A.D. Drawn by Murray Hadaway.

in the entire settlement record."¹⁸ While stressing the great changes which these new developments brought he suggests that they took place as "the consequence of local initiatives that have left no textual or numismatic trace."¹⁹ According to the hypothesis presented in this article the local initiatives suggested by Adams were fostered originally during Vologases' promotion of a "southern strategy" whose main purpose was the control of trade.

The importance of this trade is indicated by the fact that gold was exported in such large quantities

in exchange for luxury merchandise from the East that supplies of gold were becoming exhausted in Rome. So lucrative was the trade, Pliny complained, that annually the Roman treasury was drained of 55 million sesterces of gold in trade with India.²⁰

The inevitable outcome was Trajan's invasion of Parthia, beginning in A.D. 114. His motive can be interpreted as stemming largely from a desire to secure greater control over the expanding international trade rather than it being a question

¹⁸ Adams and Nissen, *Uruk Countryside*, 58.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ Pliny, *Natural History*, VI: 26/101. See also E. J. Warmington, *The Commerce Between the Roman Empire and India* (Cambridge, 1928), 274-77.

of his world conquering fantasies as Dio Cassius hinted.²¹ It appears to have been a deliberate attempt to strengthen Rome's financial position and reduce the drain on her monetary reserves. Kushan expansion into Central Asia and the Indus Valley trade routes had presented an opportunity to the Romans to deal with the East, outflanking Parthia completely.²² In addition, in A.D. 101, the Characeni had managed to force out the Parthian governor imposed upon them in A.D. 73.²³ If the Roman objective was to establish direct trading links with the East, Characene's stake in the new money game was a high one. As a partner with Rome her former commercial supremacy might be restored.

Lepper provides the most satisfactory explanation for the movement of Trajan over the course of four years.²⁴ In his view Trajan left Rome in the autumn of A.D. 113 and conquered Armenia during A.D. 114. Between that point and December A.D. 115 the number of imperial salutations for his triumphant exploits rose from seven to eleven, during the time that he accomplished the conquest and settlement of northern Mesopotamia. After wintering in Antioch and surviving the earthquake there, Trajan started out early in the spring of A.D. 116 and invaded Adiabene. Leaving a force in Adiabene he returned by way of the new frontier road (which Lepper argues had been built the previous year) and marched down to Dura Europos where another supply fleet awaited him. From Dura he followed the course of the Euphrates down toward the Parthian capital, moved over to the Tigris (by way of the canals that were drawn from the Euphrates) and made

²¹ Cassius Dio Cocceianus, *Historiarum Romanarum quae supersunt*: see E. Cary, *Dio Cassius, Roman History* (Loeb Classical Library 1925), LXVIII: 29:1.

²² Nodelman, *Characene*, 108.

²³ *Op. cit.*, 105.

²⁴ Trajan's lifetime is comparatively obscure on account of the inadequacy of the source materials covering the period concerned. His Parthian expedition is no exception. There are virtually no primary sources for the campaign from the Parthian point of view, and such fragments that have survived from Roman accounts were written by authors both biased and unfamiliar with Parthian conditions. The best summary of the problems of the source material for the invasion are F. A. Lepper, *Trajan's Parthian War* (Oxford University Press, 1948); and R. P. Longden, "The Wars of Trajan," *C.A.H.*, XI/vi, 223-252.

an unopposed crossing to Ctesiphon where the imperial treasury made an easy catch.²⁵ The Parthians had probably been deceived by the swiftness of the approach, expecting the attack to have come from the north from the Adiabene side of the Tigris. There is substantial evidence for the Roman occupation of the Parthian capital from the late spring of A.D. 116.²⁶ Trajan cannot have reached the Gulf before the midsummer of A.D. 116, and it must have been under intolerably hot conditions and with minimal Roman control of the conquered territories. During the widespread revolt that followed Trajan's arrival at Babylon²⁷ that same summer only Attambelos of Characene remained loyal to the invaders.²⁸ Although the revolt was put down, the emperor's premature death in A.D. 117 prevented his returning to secure a permanent settlement of Mesopotamia.

What role Nippur played in the war is none too clear. On the basis of the numismatic evidence Osroes can be said to have figured strongly in the activities associated with the fortress and therefore with the events in southern Babylonia as a whole.²⁹ Yet Osroes issued no tetradrachms which would have been the normal sign of his having been King of Kings. According to McDowell it was the envoy of Osroes to Trajan in Athens before the start of the war which led the Roman writers to think of him as effectively paramount king. McDowell claimed that the embassy to Trajan represented "nothing more

²⁵ The above summary is drawn from Lepper, *Parthian War*, 95-96. For the pattern of Parthian watercourses in this area see McGuire Gibson, *The City and Area of Kish* (Field Research Projects, Coconut Grove, Florida, 1972), map 7; see also Clark Hopkins, *Topography and Architecture of Seleucia-on-the-Tigris* (University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1972), 1-3.

²⁶ McDowell, *Coins*, 232.

²⁷ Regarding the advance party at Babylon see fn. 32 below.

²⁸ Nodelman, *Characene*, 110.

²⁹ Of the nineteen stratified coins excavated by the Nippur Expedition twelve are attributable to Osroes. Similarly large proportions of coins belonging to Osroes can be seen in collections that have been gathered from the surface at Nippur since the late nineteenth century. cf. Leon LeGrain, "Coins from Nippur," *Museum Journal*, 15 (Philadelphia, March, 1924) 70-76; and McGuire Gibson, "Coins as a Tool in Archaeological Surface Survey," (*Miles*) *Near Eastern Numismatics*, 10.

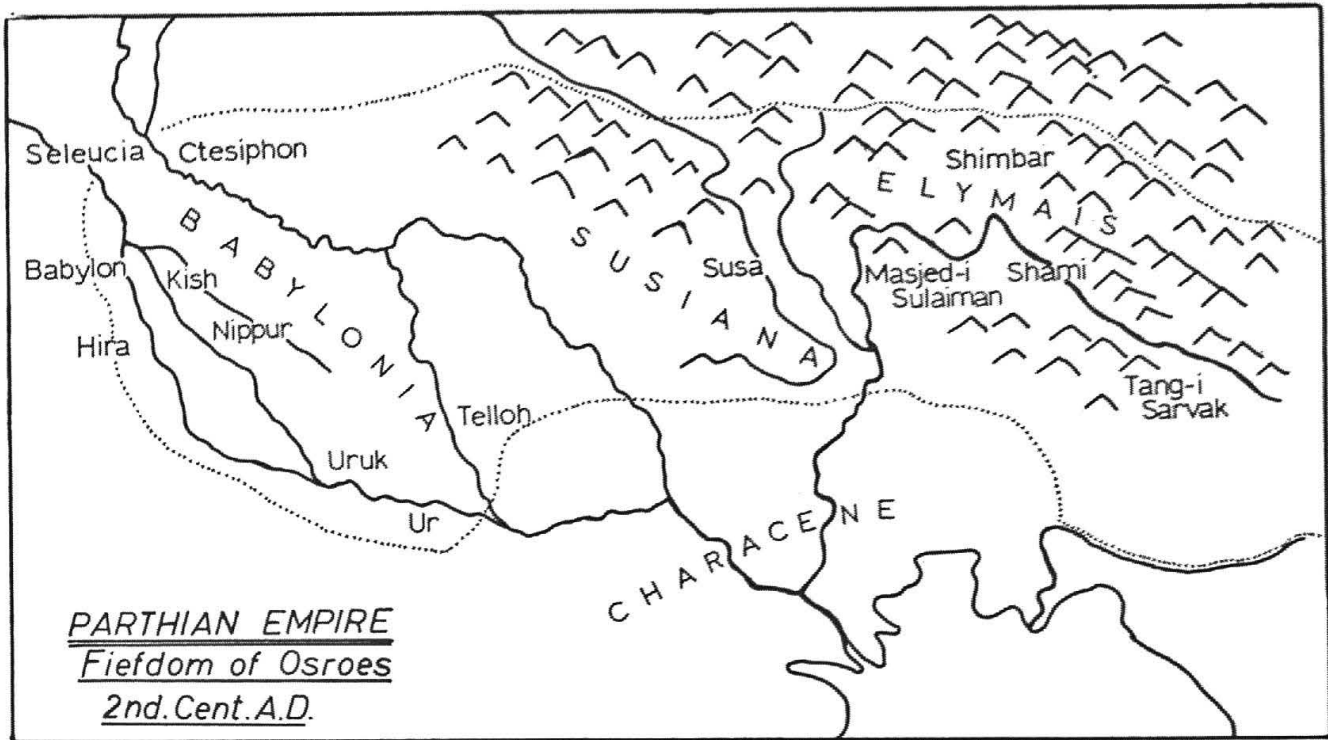


Fig. 7 Hypothesized fiefdom of Osroes, including Babylonia, Susiana, and Elymais, early 2nd Century A.D.

than a bid for Roman support."³⁰ In his eyes Osroes was a rebel. According to this interpretation the ease with which Trajan was able to take the capital can be explained by internal struggles for control of the Parthian throne.

Several factors contradict this claim. When Osroes opposed Trajan in the north he was doing so clearly on behalf of the Parthian throne. The Chronicle of Arbela refers to an event as having taken place in Adiabene "seven years after the defeat of Osroes, the Arsacid king, at the hands of Trajan."³¹ In addition, Trajan seems to have pointedly avoided the heart of Babylonia on his way down to the Gulf, preferring to join forces with Attambelos of Characene at the most northerly point of that kingdom on the Tigris side.³²

³⁰ McDowell, *Coins*, 231.

³¹ Eduard Sachau, *Die Chronik von Arbela: Ein Beitrag zur Kenntnis des ältesten Christentums im Orient* (Abhandlungen der königlichen Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Phil.-hist. Klasse, 6, Berlin, 1915), 44.

³² Nodelman, *Characene*, 110; and McDowell, *Coins*, 232. Dio Cassius speaks of an advance party of Trajan's troops at Babylon before the capture of Ctesiphon. Dio Cassius, *Roman History*, LXVII: 26/4. Perhaps the statement can be taken as corroboration of the hypothesis presented here that Babylonia belong to Osroes. An

By doing this he avoided an area where Osroes' bronze coins circulated freely, and where presumably Osroes had some degree of influence. During the peace talks which were conducted with Hadrian much later, negotiations were made for the return of Osroes' daughter and personal throne which had been taken by the Romans during Trajan's invasion.³³ The last thing that could be said about Osroes is that he appears to have collaborated with Trajan.

As previously stated, on the basis of the numismatic evidence Osroes seems to have had a strong identity with the area that was once the target of Vologases' "southern strategy," namely Babylonia

advance party may well have attempted to tackle Osroes' forces before the move against the capital. After the capture of Ctesiphon it was easier to join up with Attambelos on the eastern side of Babylonia, rather than back through Babylon itself. The weakness in this argument is that Trajan ended up at Babylon anyway. But this was after the retreat of Osroes to Susa. What Trajan's move down the Tigris achieved was to cut off Osroes completely from any possible base of support in Babylonia.

³³ Aelius Spartianus, *De Vita Hadriani*: see David Magie, "The Life of Hadrian," *Scriptores Historiae Augustae*, (Loeb Classical Library, 1922), XIII:8.

and the region immediately adjacent to the South. Yet the portraiture on Osroes' coins bears a very close resemblance to the type that appears on the roughly contemporary bronze coins from Elymais.³⁴ Now it is quite significant that around the middle of the first century A.D. the kingdom of Elymais seems to have absorbed within its control the former Parthian province of Susiana. The issue of standard Parthian coins ceased at Susa around the year A.D. 45, while the first Elymaid currency appeared there in A.D. 75.³⁵ If Osroes can be associated with Babylonia by way of coin distribution, and also with Elymais on the basis of portraiture, it is tempting to surmise that apart from Characene the whole of southern Mesopotamia fell under Osroes' control, an area that in theory belonged to the real King of Kings (fig. 7).

Osroes may have been a rebel in the sense that he challenged the imperial throne. But it is equally possible to argue that a concession to Osroes of the right to control Babylonia and to issue coins there may have been one of the way of accommodating the expanding kingdom of Elymais within the boundary of the Parthian Empire. As such Osroes represents rising Elymaid fortunes and the control of Babylonia was conceded to him as a fiefdom under the patronage of the King of Kings³⁶ as the price to pay for peaceful coexist-

³⁴ The huge side bunches of hair that are so characteristic of Sasanian portraits were not nearly so common in Parthia as a whole, except for Elymais in the late Parthian period where they are quite typical; cf. W. B. Henning, "The Monuments and Inscriptions of Tang-i Sarvak," *Asia Minor* (N.S.), 2 (1952), 151-78, and pls. 1-20; and Le Rider, *Suse*, 429 and pl. 73: 30-36.

³⁵ Le Rider, *Suse*, 425-426.

³⁶ By virtue of the tetradrachms which he issued in 433 S.E. (A.D. 121/22) Vologases must be considered to have been the King of Kings. It is his name that appears on the tetradrachms of that year. But there were three Kings with the name of Vologases who reigned in succession. It is difficult to resolve which Vologases dealt with Osroes. Historians have been reluctant to admit that Vologases II could have begun a two year reign in 389 S.E. (A.D. 77/78) and then have disappeared from the scene before reappearing again in 433 S.E. (A.D. 121/22) for a reign which lasted until 485 S.E. (A.D. 146/47). This would have involved a broken reign over a span of sixty-nine years. Le Rider interpolated another Vologases, namely a new Vologases II, to cover the intermediate period of 389-390 S.E. This is the period covered by

ence. Under these circumstances Osroes would have met the Roman challenge on behalf of the King of Kings and not in a roundabout attack upon the Parthian throne. Nippur can be regarded as one of the cities falling under Osroes' influence.

After Trajan's death Hadrian abandoned the aggressive policy of his predecessor. He was content to conclude peace with Parthia, probably considering that the Gulf was too far removed from home to be worth the price of trying to control it. The commercial activity that followed

Sellwood's Coin Type No. 72. Thus the traditional Vologases II became Vologases III and so forth; Le Rider, *Suse*, 1974-76; D. G. Sellwood, "A Die-Engraver Sequence for Later Parthian Drachms," *Numismatic Chronicle*, 7 (1967), 19, fn. 1; and D. G. Sellwood, *An Introduction to the Coinage of Parthia* (London, 1971), 226. For the traditional classification see W. Wroth, *Coins of Parthia* (British Museum Catalogue, 1903). But Le Rider's thesis appears to be in direct conflict with what is recorded in the Chronicle of Arbela. In spite of the unfortunate discrepancy in the years of office said to have been held by the bishops of Arbela between A.D. 123 and 316 it is quite clear that the second bishop, Semson, died seven years after the defeat of Osroes by Trajan in A.D. 116 (Sachau, *Arbela*, 44). This means that at the very earliest the third bishop, Isaac, must have held office during the post-Trajanic era. Now Isaac baptized a certain Rakkakht "in secret, out of fear of Vologases II the Parthian king" (Sachau, *Arbela*, 45). Clearly the author of the chronicle regarded Vologases II as the Parthian king who was on the throne in A.D. 121 and for some time thereafter. Further proof of this is added by the statement that Abraham, the fourth bishop, is said to have travelled to Ctesiphon to visit Vologases III. It appears that Abraham died during the plague that accompanied the Roman expedition of Lucius Verus (Sachau, *Arbela*, 49). It follows therefore that Vologases III was on the throne in A.D. 165, and not Vologases IV, as Le Rider would have it. For the purposes of this article the traditional classification is therefore retained, with Le Rider's interpolation given in the footnotes.—The following article came to the author's notice too late for consideration. Fiey's findings destroy the basis for rejecting Le Rider's interpolation of the additional Vologases. For Fiey casts such aspersions upon the authenticity of the Chronicle of Arbela that it cannot be used as documentary evidence of the period which it claims to represent. Le Rider's system of classification should therefore be allowed to stand. J. M. Fiey, "Auteur et date de la Chronique d'Arbèles," *L'Orient Syrien*, 12 (1967), 265-302.

is an indication that peace was honoured. Trade inscriptions attest to the fact that caravans returned regularly from Charax to Palmyra by way of Vologasias.³⁷ Both Rome and Parthia must have prospered under the new arrangement. Beginning in A.D. 121/22 (433 S.E.) with a massive issue of coins by Vologases II³⁸ the Parthian economy shows a marked improvement insofar as the higher relative silver content of the tetradrachm can perhaps be said to reflect a strong economy (figs. 1 & 2). The relative silver content of the tetradrachm rose sharply to around 60% in A.D. 121, higher than it had even been in A.D. 50. Though that percentage is still quite low it is noticeably different from the figure of between 55 and 35 % to which the silver content of the tetradrachm had dropped during the pre-war years. (The drachm had continued to decline also and was averaging around 60% after the war³⁹).

The ambitious plans for the expansion of the third phase of the Nippur Fortress were probably laid during the period of post war prosperity. A monumental structure was constructed in the north quadrant of the fortress. The dominant

³⁷ E. Will, "Marchands et chefs de caravances à Palmyre," *Syria*, 24 (1957), 262-77; and M. Rostovtzeff, *Caravan Cities* (Oxford, 1932), 142-46.

³⁸ Le Rider, *Vologases III*; Sellwood, Type 79.

³⁹ Caley found that the relative silver content of Parthian tetradrachms was much lower than that of the drachms of the same period. In fact towards the end of the Parthian period the intrinsic value of the tetradrachm can have been no more than that of a single drachm (Caley, *Parthian Coins*, 31-40). The anomaly can be explained in part by the fact that tetradrachms circulated in a different area from that of drachms. The larger denomination circulated throughout the entire Euphrates valley system; the smaller coin appears to have been associated with the Persian plateau. The difference reflects the different trading patterns of Mesopotamia and Persia (McDowell, *Coins*, 158-59). The percentages given here are a combination of Caley's figures together with the results of tests conducted by Gordus in the same project referred to in fn. 2, above. The tetradrachms were acquired on loan for the purposes of the tests from the American Numismatic Society, New York, where they had been studied by this writer during the summer Seminar of 1968. Admittedly the number of coins tested was limited, and the range of percentage was considerable, even for the same year. Nevertheless the general pattern observed in the graphs would appear to give these deductions some validity (figs. 1 and 2).

feature consisted of a large anteroom and an enclosed rear chamber. Both halls were surrounded by a broad circumambulatory. The anteroom faced an open court. Three smaller halls led off from the court on the other three sides. There are strong grounds for suggesting that this was one of the earliest versions of the four *eyvan* plan that became so widespread in Islamic architecture.⁴⁰ A comparable plan can be found in the Parthian palace at Ashur.⁴¹

The purpose of the Nippur halls was certainly ceremonial. There was a considerable build-up of tamped earth floors within the court and continuing into the *eyvan*. Fill was deliberately poured in from time to time to create level surfaces for the laying of a new floor. Connected with these intermittent floor layings was the erection, directly in front of the main *eyvan*, of a temporary structure for which the evidence was a series of postholes and trenches. The postholes might be suitable for the erection of a canopy, such as might be used in connection with the New Year Festival of Farvardagan.⁴² According to Boyce it is a traditional Zoroastrian custom at that time to spread a fresh layer of earth upon the floor of the house's ceremonial hall. The purpose is to welcome back the spirits of the dead. The point of this digression is to stress that considerable efforts were expended upon the construction of the Nippur halls. Elaborate ceremonies seem to have taken place there. Yet the building may never have been completed in the way it was originally intended. Deep foundations set between the ends of the circumambulatory and the open end of the *eyvan* at least suggest that they were designed to carry a large load, possibly a blind facade in the manner of the Ashur palace. As it was the monument functioned for a while without its facade until it fell into decline and began to be used by squatters.

The fading condition of the Nippur fortress was perhaps brought on by the worsening of relations with Rome. For the real beneficiary of the flourishing caravan traffic was Palmyra. Whether as a result of Parthian weakness or a *laissez-faire*

⁴⁰ Edward J. Keall, "Some Thoughts on the Early Eyvan," (*Miles*) *Near Eastern Numismatics*, 123-130.

⁴¹ Walter Andrae and Heinz Lenzen, *Die Partherstadt Assur* (W.V.D.O.G., 57, Leipzig, 1933), pls. 9-11.

⁴² Mary Boyce, "The Zoroastrian Houses of Yazd," *Iran and Islam* (Essays in memory of the Late Vladimir Minorsky, ed. C. E. Bosworth, Edinburgh, 1971), 128.

policy, Palmyrene merchants were protected by their own mercenaries along the stretches of the Middle Euphrates which technically speaking should have been controlled by Parthia. Dura, Anat and Hit were garrisoned by Palmyrene contingents.⁴³ This was tantamount to an acknowledgement of Roman supremacy, since these forces were auxiliaries of the Roman army. When the Palmyrene merchants began to initiate commercial ventures on their own, without operating through the Characene middlemen, it must have seemed that a virtual monopoly was being established. The Parthians began to lose what control they had over the lucrative caravan traffic.

In A.D. 161 Vologases III⁴⁴ made a desperate bid to exploit Roman weaknesses that became apparent after the death of the emperor Antoninus Pius.⁴⁵ Vologases' move was an attempt to conquer Syria and regain control of trade. But the Parthian king's plans backfired. For in the late second century A.D. Rome was still prosperous and the demand for oriental luxuries continued unabated. Characene enjoyed some portion of that trade, with her merchants probably operating across the desert rather than up through Parthia. But as for Parthia, the Roman response to the renewal of hostilities was an invasion under Lucius Verus in A.D. 165 which caused the total disruption of the economy and a long slide of which the ultimate outcome was the collapse of the Parthian Empire. After enduring the ravages of Septimus Severus in Mesopotamia in A.D. 197 and 200 the Parthian dynasty finally came to an end when new and more vital forces in Iran began to take over.

It is hypothesized that the late Parthian history of Babylonia can be viewed in a microcosm at Nippur. For the site lost its important status when the garrison of the fortress was withdrawn, probably to take the field against Lucius Verus. Nippur continued to be inhabited (up to the tenth

⁴³ Nodelman, *Characene*, p. 111; and René Mouterde and A. Poidebard, "La voie antique des caravanes entre Palmyre et Hit au II^e siècle après J.C.," *Syria*, 12 (1931), 113.

⁴⁴ Le Rider, Vologases IV; Sellwood, Type 84.

⁴⁵ Rostovtzeff, *Caravan Cities*, 118.

century)⁴⁶ but the city never again played an important role in international politics. It is surmised here that the need of the Parthians to muster all their resources in the North to deal with the outbreak of hostilities with Rome after A.D. 161 was the single major cause for the demise of the Phase III Fortress at Nippur and, in fact, for the abandonment of the entire South. The new wars threw Syria into a state of anarchy, echoing the troubled years of the first century B.C. The subsequent military campaigns against the Romans severely crippled the caravan traffic, whether it followed the course of the Euphrates or crossed the desert further to the south. Although Adams expresses doubts that the renewal of troubles with Rome had that much effect upon the abandonment of the South he does acknowledge the great contrast between the earlier developments (of which mention has been made previously in this article) and the sudden decline in the number of settlements that occurred during the second century. "The partial abandonment. . . seems to have been more abrupt and long lasting than any that had occurred previously."⁴⁷ It is hypothesized here, then, that the renewal of hostilities with Rome disrupted trade routes with the result that the "southern strategy" became obsolete. Its purpose had been the development of the South and the curtailment of Characene in order to control trade. When the Sasanians came to power in Iran in A.D. 226 the management of their Empire was quite different from that of the Parthians. Patterns of trade changed. Once more, for a while, Nippur and southern Babylonia slid into a backwater of neglect.

⁴⁶ For instance Nippur was large enough to boast a Nestorian bishop in the eighth century A.D. But by the tenth century the bishopric of Nippur had been absorbed by the See of an-Nil to the north. Fiey, *Assyrie Chrétienne*, 250-52. The decline of the water-courses drawn from the Euphrates near Babylon and the growth of Wasit in Islamic times, with the subsequent concentration of investment in the irrigation systems on the Tigris side, probably account more than anything for the eventual abandonment of the Nippur area.

⁴⁷ Adams, *Uruk Countryside*, 58.