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## Nero's Eastern Policy and the Peace of Rhandeia

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NERO'S EASTERN POLICY AND THE PEACE OF RHANDEIA

by

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A THESIS

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# NERO'S EASTERN POLICY AND THE PEACE OF RHANDEIA

HENRY SMITH

HISTORY

ABSTRACT

This thesis will argue that Corbulo's campaigns in Armenia and the subsequent Peace of Rhandeia were reflective of a longstanding foreign policy which had been adopted in the aftermath of the ambush at Teutoburg Forest and continued under Augustus' successors. Nearly every aspect of the campaign, from the composition of the army, to the strategy employed by Corbulo, was an expression of the post-Augustan shift from expansion to defense. In place of conquest, the maintenance of prestige and the projection of power became the primary objectives of the Roman emperors, including Nero. The war in Armenia was fought to maintain Roman influence in Armenia without upsetting the broader balance of power between Rome and their principal geopolitical rival in the region, Parthia.

Keywords: Rome, Parthia, Armenia, frontier, prestige, client-state

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## Introduction

The Roman and Parthian empires were the preeminent political and military powers competing for influence and territory in the Middle East from the First Century BCE to the early Third Century CE when the Parthians were defeated and replaced by the Sassanian Persians. One of the most important theaters of recurring conflict was the kingdom of Armenia, where Roman and Parthian interests repeatedly clashed, most notably in the 50's and early 60's CE during the reigns of the Emperor Nero of Rome and King Vologases I of Parthia. After five years of alternating success for both sides, the war was ended with a treaty which saw the Parthian-backed king of Armenia Tiridates I, who was also the brother of Vologases, submit and acknowledge Armenia's status as a vassal of the Roman Empire. This project will analyze the Peace of Rhandeia as a continuation of an existing security policy which had been in place since the end of Augustus' reign while simultaneously exploring how the conflict and its conclusion fit into the broader foreign policy goals of the post-Augustan empire.

This thesis will argue that Corbulo's campaigns in Armenia and the subsequent Peace of Rhandeia were reflective of a longstanding foreign policy which had been adopted in the aftermath of the ambush at Teutoburg Forest and continued under Augustus' successors. Nearly every aspect of the campaign, from the composition of the army, to the strategy employed by Corbulo, was an expression of the post-Augustan shift from expansion to defense. In place of conquest, the maintenance of prestige and the

projection of power became the primary objectives of the Roman emperors, including Nero. The war in Armenia was fought to maintain Roman influence in Armenia without upsetting the broader balance of power between Rome and their principal geopolitical rival in the region, Parthia.

Before we examine the conflict and subsequent peace between Parthia and Rome, we should briefly evaluate the political status of the two empires and the kingdom they fought over. Since their victory over the Carthaginians in the Second Punic War in 201 BCE, the Romans had spent the last two-and-a-half centuries consolidating their control over the lands surrounding the Mediterranean as well as Western Europe. The increasing strains of a growing territorial empire combined with an ever increasing dependence on the military and a series of ambitious generals would eventually lead to multiple civil wars throughout the middle of the first century BCE which would transform the Roman Republic into an empire ruled by the Julio-Claudian Dynasty, of which Nero was the fifth and final ruler. At the time of Nero's reign the approximate population of the Roman Empire would have numbered somewhere between fifty and sixty million people divided across five social classes: Senators, Equestrians, Plebeians (all of whom were citizens), noncitizen foreigners, and slaves. The Roman Army was comprised of twenty-five legions, each of which was roughly five-thousand men strong. Thus, an army of about one-hundred and twenty-five-thousand enlisted citizens combined with a roughly equal or greater number of noncitizen auxiliaries would create a total armed force of about two-hundred and fifty to three-hundred-thousand men.

Meanwhile, Parthia's history had been considerably more tumultuous. The Achaemenid Empire had once been the most powerful empire in the Middle East and

arguably the entire world. However, after Alexander's conquest in the fourth century BCE, Persia had become a province of the Macedonians. After the death of Alexander and the partition of his empire, Persia remained part of the Seleucid Empire. However, during the mid-third-century BCE, Artabanus I became the Shah of Parthia, a small region in Northeastern Persia. He and his descendants would reconquer much of the old Persian Empire from the Seleucids. At its greatest extent the Arsacid Empire (as it is alternatively known) would stretch from Bactria (modern-day Afghanistan and Pakistan) in the East to Babylon (modern-day Iraq) in the West.

While the Parthian Empire was more territorially compact than its Roman counterpart, its strategic location was arguably superior to that of Rome. Situated between Rome and the Mediterranean World to their West and India and China to their East, the Parthians controlled the nexus point of one of the greatest trading highways in the ancient world. Learning from their Achaemenid ancestors, the Parthians grew rich off the merchant trade that passed through their lands. While the estimates of Parthia's population vary greatly, it is unlikely that it was significantly smaller than that of Rome. As in the Roman Empire, the majority of the population made their living as peasant farmers and herders while a very small minority of merchants and nobles made up the social elite. Unlike the Romans, the Parthians did not possess a standing professional army though they could likely muster an army similar if not greater in size to the total force which the Romans kept stationed in their Eastern provinces.

Lastly, we turn to Armenia. Initially a satrapy of the old Achaemenid Empire, the Kingdom of Armenia emerged after Alexander the Great's conquest of Persia and the subsequent splintering of his empire. Thereafter, the Orontid and Artaxiad dynasties

would rule over Armenia for the next two-and-a-half-centuries. They would engage in frequent warfare with the Seleucids, eventually pushing into Syria and Cilicia to form a brief Armenian Empire. However, the continued expansion of the Roman Republic in the early First Century BCE and their eventual defeat of Mithridates VI of Pontus put an end to any hopes the Armenians might have had of establishing lasting hegemony in the region. The Romans would defeat Tigranes the Great at the battle of Tigranocerta in 69 BCE and Armenia would accept its status as a client state a few years later after negotiating peace with the general Pompey Magnus. The Romans briefly lost control over Armenia during the civil war between Octavian and Antony but this was quickly reversed when Augustus later negotiated his peace with the Parthians and placed the first of a series of pro-Roman client kings on the throne.



## Overview of Roman-Parthian Relations Prior to Nero

The Romans' knowledge of the Persians almost certainly came from contact with the Greeks and their eventual access to Greek records which they could have gained from their conquest of Magna Graecia (Southern Italy) and later Syracuse and almost certainly from their subjugation of Greece itself around the Third Punic War. Significant diplomatic contact would have to wait until after the fall of the Seleucid and Pontic Kingdoms which dominated Syria and Asia Minor. The first major diplomatic agreement between the two powers came when Pompey Magnus and Phraates III agreed to partition Armenia between them in the mid 60's BCE and the border was formally established near the Euphrates River.

The first major conflict between the Romans and Parthians came in 53 BCE when Marcus Licinius Crassus marched East with several legions to begin his ill-fated invasion. Crassus was the wealthiest man in Roman politics at the time and the primary financial contributor to the First Triumvirate but his military accomplishments were sparse in comparison to those of Caesar and Pompey. Lured onto a flat desert-plain near Carrhae, Crassus' army of mostly foot soldiers were almost wiped out by the Parthians' heavy cataphracts and horse archers. The late Republican Era saw a series of inconclusive conflicts between the Romans and Parthians, most notably under the Roman general Mark Antony, who would eventually be defeated by his erstwhile ally Octavian, better known as Augustus. The ascension of Augustus marked the beginning of a more stable

period of Roman-Parthian relations. Augustus negotiated for the return of Crassus' lost eagle standards and convinced the Parthians to accept Roman control over Armenia. With the exception of a minor conflict in 36 CE, the founding of the Roman Principate began a period of nearly unbroken peace between Rome and Parthia until the reign of Nero.

## Rome's Post-Varian Defense Policy

Augustus' reign had seen the rapid expansion of Rome's borders. However, after the Varian Disaster at Teutoburg Forest saw the annihilation of three entire legions, Augustus ordered all remaining legions to return from their expeditions and consolidate defensive positions around the empire's borders. The magnitude of the Varian Disaster's historical importance cannot be overstated. Neil Faulkner describes it as "a transformation of the greatest historical significance: AD 9 was nothing less than the central pivot on which the whole history of Rome turned."<sup>1</sup> After the civil wars of the Late Republic, Augustus had discharged most of the legions he and Antony had deployed in their struggle against Caesar's assassins and later against each other. He did this to return an atmosphere of normalcy to Roman society and prevent any other generals from developing a rival power base that could once again lead to civil war. The army also had to be trimmed down to save money. Faulkner estimates that roughly half of Rome's total tax revenue was devoted to paying and supplying the soldiery. Unfortunately, the decrease in military forces combined with the continuation of military expansionism exposed Rome to an increased level of danger in the event of a major defeat, such as the one that occurred in Teutoburg Forest. Because Augustus only kept enough troops as were absolutely necessary to maintain internal security while continuing with his wars of

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<sup>1</sup> Neil Faulkner, *Rome: Empire of the Eagles*. (New York: Routledge, 2010), 186.

conquest, any battle which resulted in massive casualties would strain the manpower of the Roman army to its limit.<sup>2</sup> Faulkner summarizes the problem:

The consequent army reductions had left the empire without a strategic reserve, while the ideology of the regime and the expectations of its supporters...had propelled it into an unbroken succession of military adventures. The result was that the empire was militarily overextended, such that, because it lacked reserves, one major tactical defeat risked strategic disaster.<sup>3</sup>

The Varian Disaster had revealed the weakness of what had previously been seen as an unstoppable military machine. In a rapid turn of events, an empire and an emperor, who saw themselves as invincible, became acutely aware of their vulnerabilities.

From 9 CE onwards, the policy of Rome would largely be one of defense and consolidation. Edward Gibbon ESQ. explains Augustus' logic:

Inclined to peace by his temper and situation, it was easy for him to discover that Rome, in her present exalted situation, had much less to hope than to fear from the chance of arms; and, in the prosecution of remote wars, the undertaking became every day more difficult, the event more doubtful, and the possession more precarious, and less beneficial...On the death of that emperor, his testament was publicly read in the senate. He bequeathed, as a valuable legacy to his successors, the advice of confining the empire within those limits which nature seemed to have placed as its permanent bulwarks and boundaries.<sup>4</sup>

While many would dispute Gibbon's assertion that Augustus was "inclined to peace" given his extensive track record of militaristic expansion, his focus on Augustus' final request that his successors maintain the borders of the Roman Empire as they were at the time of his death is important.

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<sup>2</sup> *Empire of the Eagles*, 177-186.

<sup>3</sup> *Empire of the Eagles*, 186.

<sup>4</sup> Edward Gibbon ESQ., *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire. Volume I.* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1870), 3-4.

It is worth noting that Gibbon's understanding of borders and frontiers was a reflection of his living in 18th Century Britain, an empire which possessed a far more acute understanding of geography and borders than the Romans did. C.R. Whittaker argues that most scholars, historians, and writers of 18th and 19th Century Britain and France ascribed an interest and fixation on borders which the Romans did not actually possess. He asserts that the notion of natural boundaries divided on logical geographical points such as mountains and rivers only truly became widespread during the Age of Absolutism.<sup>5</sup> Aside from these misunderstandings by Gibbon and later scholars of the Roman Empire, his overall point remains: the previous five centuries of Roman history had been defined by expansion and conquest. A seemingly endless series of wars of aggression had transformed Rome into the center of the Mediterranean world. Now that chapter was closed, and a new era of (relative) restraint was about to begin. Any future wars of conquest were to be the exception rather than the rule, while most offensive wars were essentially large-scale raids to punish or intimidate various barbarian tribes in a given region.

For many people living in the orbit of the Roman world, life beyond the Roman frontier was largely indistinguishable from life within Rome's provinces. According to Alan K. Bowman: "Roman control did not end at provincial boundaries...the methods used outside provinces hardly differed from those used inside and must surely have emphasized the insignificance, in important respects, of the frontier between 'Roman' and 'non-Roman territory.'"<sup>6</sup> As Bowman explains, the Roman military often occupied

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<sup>5</sup> C.R. Whittaker, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire: A Social and Economic Study*. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1994), 1-3.

<sup>6</sup> Alan K. Bowman, "Provincial Administration and Taxation," in *The Cambridge Ancient History: Volume X The Augustan Empire 43 B.C. - A.D. 69, Second Edition*, ed. Alan K.

territory beyond their direct administrative control and Rome often requisitioned hostages and soldiers from neighboring tribes and kingdoms, even those not formally considered allies or clients of the Roman Empire. Roman colonies and communities were often established beyond the frontier and Roman governors occasionally settled or moved different communities across the border, to or from various provinces.<sup>7</sup> Thus, it can be inferred that Rome's sphere of influence extended well beyond its vaguely defined frontiers, in spite of the fact that Roman expansionism had largely come to an end.

Among the Julio-Claudians the only major departure from the Augustan defense policy had been Emperor Claudius' invasion of Britain in 44 CE. This reflects the unique tenuousness of Claudius' position as the newly-made Emperor of Rome rather than a reversal of Augustus' overall policy. As T.E.J. Wiedeman explains, Claudius' military expeditions to Britannia were necessary to shore up his military credentials by achieving what even Julius Caesar could not accomplish.<sup>8</sup> A similar logic compelled the retaliatory campaigns of Germanicus against the Cherusci in 14 CE, the same year that Augustus died. As the heir apparent to Tiberius, Germanicus would need to firmly establish his reputation as a capable military commander. The campaigns would also remind the Germanic peoples, as well as Rome's own subjects and allies, that Roman military dominance was still intact. Here is where the important concept of prestige first appears in the post-Teutoburg foreign policy of Rome (the importance of this concept will be explored later in more detail).<sup>9</sup> In the decades after Augustus, foreign military campaigns

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Bowman, Edward Champlin, Andrew Lintott (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 349-50.

<sup>7</sup> *Cambridge Ancient History*, 350.

<sup>8</sup> T.E.J. Wiedemann, "Tiberius to Nero," in *The Cambridge Ancient History: Volume X The Augustan Empire 43 B.C. - A.D. 69. Second Edition*, Alan K. Bowman, Edward Champlin, Andrew Lintott (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 235.

<sup>9</sup> *Cambridge University Press*, 209.

were exercises in confidence building and power projection. Apart from Britannia, the Julio-Claudians would never again make a serious attempt to extend their dominion.

Apart from the defeat at Teutoburg Forest, there were also economic reasons for Rome's shift from aggressive expansionism to defense and consolidation. Faulkner offers a theory based on potential profit (or lack thereof) to explain why Roman expansion largely ended with Augustus. From his perspective, Roman expansion halted at regions which were agriculturally underdeveloped. Since all ancient civilizations and empires were centered around agriculture, the cost of developing vast swathes of wilderness, coupled with the initial cost of conquering it, would have offered a formidable deterrent to many of Augustus' successors.<sup>10</sup>

Faulkner's theory is part of his broader Marxist argument that the Roman Empire, and indeed all empires, exist for the primary purpose of wealth extraction. While historians may agree or disagree with this broader viewpoint, Faulkner's assertions about why Rome failed to significantly advance its borders after the First Century BCE are worth considering. With the exception of lands between the Euphrates and Tigris rivers (the Persian heartland), it is true that most of the regions which bordered the Roman Empire were significantly less economically developed than those regions which fell within Rome's boundaries. In some places this was due to the regional environment; the Sahara desert and the mountains of Caledonia (modern-day Scotland) are two notable examples. While the lands of Mesopotamia may have been wealthy enough to sustain an invading army, they were already occupied by an empire whose military resources were equal to those of Rome. It is worth noting that Rome had invaded or annexed

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<sup>10</sup> *Empire of the Eagles*, 220.

under-developed or unprofitable areas before such as Hispania and Britannia. Therefore, while Faulkner's explanation is intriguing it may not be entirely sufficient.

Rome's national defense strategy was complex and relied on several complementary factors. Edward Luttwak explains the defense-policy of the Julio-Claudian era. He argues that the internal rebellions, rather than foreign invasion, was often the most pressing security issue for Augustus' successors. Few of Rome's neighbors had the military resources or manpower to even attempt a serious incursion into Roman territory and raids on border settlements and villages could generally only inflict limited damage. Even Parthia, whose power far outweighed that of Rome's Germanic or African neighbors, was only considered a threat to Rome's interests on the frontier of Syria and Armenia. From Tiberius to Nero, the main concern was always preventing or quashing provincial revolts. While the legions were the most obvious tool in the Empire's arsenal, Luttwak argues that they were part of a more comprehensive system. Colonies of Roman citizens as well as the Roman client kingdoms, especially those in the East, were essential to maintaining imperial control over the far-flung provinces, many of which had only recently been conquered under Augustus or Caesar. The borders of the Empire were not heavily patrolled nor had they been heavily fortified as they would later be in the Second and Third Centuries.<sup>11</sup>

In Armenia, Rome's struggle to maintain control was made ever more complicated by the proximity of their great rival, the Parthians. Neil Faulkner details the intricacies of great power competition in this particular border region:

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<sup>11</sup> Edward N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire: From the First Century CE to the Third*. (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2016), 10-19.



Here the great powers intrigued, plotted and manoeuvred, directing embassies and ultimatums at one another, buying and selling kings, trading the territories of border tribes, sometimes sending in a 'peace-keeping' force, sometimes fuelling a vicious little proxy war, occasionally launching a full-scale invasion. There was little chance of any final resolution. The struggle was all to do with keeping a balance of power.<sup>12</sup>

This combination of diplomacy, subterfuge, and military force in the border territories formed the crux of Rome's national security strategy and was particularly characteristic of their relationship with the Parthians. Both sides constantly sought new avenues and opportunities to gain an advantage over each other, while implicitly understanding that neither had any hope of fully evicting the other completely.

Most of the territory dividing Roman and Parthian lands was the inhospitable desert of modern-day Jordan and Western Iraq. As Faulkner explains, any invasion into the Parthian heartland would have to come south along the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, both of which originated in Western and Southern Armenia respectively. Conversely, any attack on Roman Syria, Cappadocia or Pontus would similarly have to go through Armenia. The mountains of Armenia were also an excellent natural defense which could slow an invading army long enough for whoever was defending to organize a response force. Given all this, the region's strategic importance was clear. Armenia was a bottleneck; a launching pad for invasion and a shield against it. Whichever power controlled this kingdom would have the upper-hand and could threaten the provinces of its neighbors while safeguarding its own.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Neil Faulkner, *Apocalypse, The Great Jewish Revolt Against Rome AD 66-73*. (Gloucestershire: Amberley Publishing. 2012), 13. Google Play.

<sup>13</sup> *Apocalypse*, 11-13.

## Profiles of Nero and Vologases

The two best sources we have on the reign of Nero and the Julio-Claudian dynasty as a whole are Tacitus' *Annals of Imperial Rome* and Suetonius' *The Twelve Caesars*. According to Suetonius, Nero became emperor in 54 CE at the age of seventeen following the death of his father Claudius.<sup>14</sup> Tacitus offers greater details: Nero's mother Agrippina the Younger, who was also Claudius' niece and had married him in 49 CE, poisoned him with mushrooms and then arranged for the Praetorians to acclaim Nero emperor and present him to the Senate. The first five years of Nero's reign are generally seen as his best years. In this period, Nero was generally guided by two primary advisors: Annaeus Seneca, a Senator from Spain, and Afranius Burrus, Prefect of the Praetorians and an Equestrian from Gaul. Due to their influence, Nero was initially seen as a relatively wise and even-handed ruler despite his youth.<sup>15</sup>

We have far less information on Parthian politics or the ascension of Vologases I. He came to power in 51 CE only three years prior to Nero, and while his age is unknown, it is likely that he was at least in his mid-twenties or possibly his early-thirties though he could have been considerably older. He reigned for twenty-seven years until his death in 78 CE. While the exact circumstances of his ascension are unknown, we do know that he

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<sup>14</sup> Suetonius. *The Twelve Caesars*. Book Six. Chapter VIII. Translated by A.S. Kline (Poetry in Motion, 2010).

<sup>15</sup> Tacitus. *The Annals of Imperial Rome*. Book XII-XIII. Translated by John Church and William Jackson Brodribb (New York: Barnes & Noble, 2007).

came to power through some arrangement with his brothers Pacorus and Tiridates. The elder Pacorus was granted the kingdom of Media Atropatene while the younger Tiridates was made king of Armenia. In exchange, both brothers promised to support Vologases in his continued reign over the Persian Empire. The obvious problem with promising Tiridates the throne of Armenia was that it was occupied by a Roman client king per the terms of the agreement that Augustus had struck with the Parthians roughly seventy years earlier in 20 BCE. Fortunately, the invasion of Armenia by an Iberian prince in 51 CE would give Vologases and Tiridates the perfect pretext to launch their own invasion and seat Tiridates on the throne.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> Tacitus, *The Annals*, XII.

## Prelude to Conflict

The Parthian intervention into Armenia was precipitated by the invasion of an Iberian prince named Rhadamistus who sought to overthrow the pro-Roman king Mithridates of Armenia (this honorific was likely applied to differentiate him from the more well-known Mithridates of Pontus). The initial Parthian assault succeeded in ousting Rhadamistus temporarily but was forced to withdraw due to disease and the onset of winter. However, Rhadamistus' brutal repression and general lack of legitimacy with his subjects eventually led to a popular revolt, ousting the usurper and allowing Tiridates to return and claim his place as the ruler of Armenia. This in effect converted Armenia into a Satrapy of the Parthian empire, ending more than seventy years of Roman dominance in the region.<sup>17</sup>

The timing for the Parthian's invasion could not have been better. Emperor Claudius' health was steadily deteriorating in the last years of his reign and his death in 54 CE led to the ascension of Nero. Thus, Nero's advisors were more concerned with consolidating the young emperor's position (and by extension their own) as the new ruler of the Roman Empire. Eventually, they decided to dispatch Gnaeus Domitius Corbulo, widely considered to be the most formidable Roman general of his time, to Syria in order to organize the defense of the Eastern provinces from possible attack as well as an eventual response force. However, upon seeing the condition of the Eastern garrisons

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<sup>17</sup> Tacitus, *The Annals*, XII.

(discipline had grown lax and many of the soldiers were close to the mandatory retirement age), Corbulo and the Syrian governor decided to try and settle the conflict through negotiation. Vologases, who was in the midst of confronting a rebellion in his own territory, was more than willing to accommodate them. Initially, it seemed as if war might be averted.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Tacitus, *The Annals*, XIII.

## Organization and Composition of Forces

While the Romans and Parthians were sending messages back and forth trying to come to a compromise, Corbulo set about training, organizing, and reinvigorating his forces. Stephen Dando-Collins describes the composition of Corbulo's army: Corbulo had two main legions, the VI Ferrata and X Fretensis, as well as detachments from the III Gallica in Judea. The core of this army, as with all Roman armies, were the heavy legionary infantry. These men were armed with a short-sword called a *Gladius*, two javelins or *Pila*, and a large rectangular shield known as a *Scutum*. They were also outfitted in heavy armor known as *Lorica Segmenta* for its segmented design. Most of the cavalry, archers, and skirmishers would have been provided by Rome's allies in the region: Sophene, Commagene, Armenia Minor, and the parts of Judea directly ruled by Herod Agrippa. Provincial auxiliaries from other regions in the Empire might have also provided some archers and cavalry. Corbulo discharged the elderly legionaries, bolstered the ranks with new recruits, and forced his troops to spend the winter in the Cappadocian mountains in order to restore the appropriate standards of discipline and fitness expected of soldiers of the Roman army. There is far less information about the nature of the joint Armenian/Parthian force commanded by Tiridates, but it was likely typical of most Persian armies of that era. In contrast to the Romans, Parthian armies and tactics were centered around the use of cavalry, particularly horse archers and heavy cataphracts (the latter of these would later be adopted by the Eastern Roman Empire). Archers and

skirmishers were also likely in abundance while most of the infantry would have been lightly armed and armored making them ill-suited to face Rome's heavy legionaries without support.<sup>19</sup>

The majority of Corbulo's army would have been non-Italian in origin. Lawrence Keppie estimates that, by the end of Nero's reign, less than fifty percent of all Roman legionaries were from Italy. Certainly there were many of Italian origins whose ancestors had been part of Roman colonies from the days of the Republic. However, the proportion of non-Italians serving as citizen legionaries had increased dramatically since the civil wars of the late Republic and the steady expansion of Roman citizenship which had accompanied the conquests of Augustus. It is likely that the majority of the officer corps were still composed of Italians while those of provincial origins made up most of the rank-and-file. Many of these provincial citizens were likely descended from auxiliaries who had served in the Roman army previously and earned citizenship for themselves and their families. In the East, many of these non-Italian legionaries hailed from the provinces of Syria, Bithynia, Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Cilicia, and Asia (modern East-Turkey). Some might have also come from Cyprus and Egypt.<sup>20</sup> Many would have spoken some dialect of Greek or Aramaic as their primary language though many would have also spoken Latin with varying degrees of fluency.

The reliance on local troops levied from the provinces or client kingdoms was not incidental. The borders of Rome had long since expanded beyond Italy's capacity to

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<sup>19</sup> Stephen Dando-Collins, *Legions of Rome: The Definitive History of Every Imperial Roman Legion*. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2010), 296-8.

<sup>20</sup> Lawrence Keppie, "The Army and the Navy," in *The Cambridge Ancient History: Volume X The Augustan Empire 43 B.C.- A.D. 69. Second Edition*, ed. Alan K. Bowman, Edward Champlin, Andrew Lintott (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 387-393.

provide adequate manpower to maintain security. The contribution of troops from allied client kingdoms was particularly important and reveals much about how the Romans maintained control in the East. Unlike the provinces, client kingdoms were largely autonomous states whose rulers exercised sovereignty over most internal matters. Their people were subjects to their own kings and largely followed their own laws and customs. Their main obligations to Rome were regular payments of tribute as well as periodic military support for campaigns abroad (as was the case in Armenia) and domestic (such as the Jewish Revolt of 67 CE). Neil Faulkner summarizes the empire-client relationship:

Client kings like Herod offered imperial domination at a discount. These men ruled their own states and paid the costs of government from their own resources – there was no need for Roman funding, infrastructure and soldiers. But they deferred to Rome in everything that mattered, and stood firmly on its side as policemen of internal order, buffer against foreign aggression, and ready source of troops and tribute in times of trouble.<sup>21</sup>

The incorporation of client kingdoms into the machinery of Roman governance allowed Rome to extract wealth and manpower in a less direct manner than they would a province. While the returns may not have been as high as what was afforded by direct control over a province, it was far more cost effective. In this way, the Romans borrowed a Persian method of governance as they were one of the first empires to effectively develop and utilize the client-state model of imperial organization.

The recruitment of provincial citizens was also a vital part of maintaining control and security in the East. Syria in particular offers an excellent case study. Bordering both Armenia and Mesopotamia, Syria was the first line of defense against any incursion from the East. Hence, it was also the most heavily militarized of the Eastern provinces, with

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<sup>21</sup> *Apocalypse*, 49.



four legions stationed there to ward off any possible attack by the Parthians or their vassals. They could also provide a quick reaction force whenever the periodic unrest in Judea got out of hand. David Kennedy provides an overview of the province's history and how it was administered. During the Late Republic, Syria had been the site of many conflicts between Pompey, Armenia, Caesar, the Liberators, Antony, Parthia, and several other generals and kingdoms. Under the Julio-Claudians, the region had been progressively stabilized. Latin, Hellenic, and Semitic culture enjoyed a fairly calm coexistence. Economic development, particularly in agriculture, as well as urban development through various building programs dating back to Syria's annexation, helped the local populace grow more accommodating to their Roman rulers. A few military colonies for retired veterans were established in the Late Republic and would have provided the Romans with a steadfastly loyal populace of experienced former soldiers should unrest ever flare up, though this was rare under the Julio-Claudians and Flavians. These colonies would eventually become home to retired Syrian legionaries as well as their Greek and Italian counterparts. Syria was somewhat ahead of other provinces when it came to recruiting the local populace for auxiliaries and legionaries. Many Syrian auxiliaries would have gained citizenship for themselves and their families, subsequently passing it on to their descendants. Some retired Roman and Greek legionaries likely would have intermarried with the local Syrians as well. The expansion of Roman citizenship through retired Syrian legionaries, intermarriage between the local populace and Roman colonists, as well as the introduction of Hellenic and Latin culture through various building programs would have steadily integrated the province into the

imperial system over generations. Throughout the Roman East, it is likely that political, economic, and cultural integration followed a similar process.<sup>22</sup>

For Italians and non-Italians, service in the army was one of the few avenues of social mobility in an empire with an extremely rigid class system. Pay was fairly good relative to other occupations and the retirement bonuses, plunder, and other gratuities could at least lift a soldier and his family out of poverty though few men ever became rich. Those that did succeed in accruing wealth in the army did so by promotion. The pay gaps between officers and enlisted men were substantial with Centurions and Legates making the most. According to Collins, legionaries were paid nine-hundred Sesterces a year in three installments while Centurions made roughly twenty-thousand. The *Primus Pilus* or Chief Centurion of a legion made one-hundred thousand Sesterces and the legates made roughly four-hundred thousand per-year. Most Centurions were promoted from within the ranks and their children or grand-children were sometimes wealthy or prominent enough to enter the Equestrian order and enjoy their own careers in politics and the military.<sup>23</sup> For many, the war in Armenia would have been their first experience of conflict in their entire lives, though many would go on to serve under Vespasian in the Roman Jewish War of 67 CE.

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<sup>22</sup> David Kennedy, "Syria," in *The Cambridge Ancient History: Volume X The Augustan Empire 43 B.C.- A.D. 69. Second Edition*, ed. Alan K. Bowman, Edward Champlin, Andrew Lintott. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 703-728.

<sup>23</sup> *Legions of Rome*, 24-26, 40-41.

## 58 CE: The Conflict Begins

Despite the two sides sharing an apparent mutual interest in peace, direct conflict proved unavoidable. According to Tacitus, some of Corbulo's soldiers disregarded his orders not to engage the enemy, instead launching retaliatory attacks on Parthian positions when they heard that the Parthians had been raiding pro-Roman Armenian settlements. Though Corbulo punished the soldiers who had disobeyed him, he also ordered his army to march in separate columns into Armenia where they began a massive offensive against the Parthians and their allies. Tiridates request for parley was rebuffed, instead being directed by Corbulo to petition directly to Emperor Nero. Corbulo continued to press his offensive, eventually besieging the capital at Artaxata. After decisively defeating Tiridates' forces, the people of Artaxata surrendered.<sup>24</sup>

Corbulo's strategy seems to have been centered on isolating and besieging the forts and military garrisons throughout Armenia. Tacitus states:

Corbulo, that war might not be uselessly protracted, and also to compel the Armenians to defend their possessions, prepared to destroy their fortresses, himself undertaking the assault on the strongest of all in that province named Volandum...Corbulo's lieutenant and camp-prefect met with similar success; three forts were stormed by them in one day, and the remainder, some from panic, others by the consent of the occupants, capitulated.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Tacitus, *The Annals*, XIII.

<sup>25</sup> Tacitus, *The Annals*, XIII.

This strategy would be imitated by Vespasian and Titus during their suppression of the Jewish Revolt roughly ten years after Corbulo's campaign. This preference for slow, methodical warfare was a reflection of the Augustan system put into place after the Varian Disaster. Neil Faulkner explains this shift to more conservative military strategies by Rome's generals in his discussion of general Vespasian's campaign in Galilee:

Vespasian commanded an expensive, high-tech, fully professional army. Every man was a well-equipped and thoroughly trained specialist. Losses were expensive and hard to replace...All Roman generals knew that the soldiers entrusted to them were highly valued – especially the citizen legionaries. Gaps in the line could not easily be made good, and any major disaster would threaten the security of the whole empire. Roman generalship was always aggressive, but now, under the emperors, aggression was tempered with caution.<sup>26</sup>

Faulkner also refers to his earlier argument about how Augustus' demilitarization of the army had left it without a reserve force. Like Vespasian, Corbulo's goal was to restore Roman control over the region with a minimum of casualties. Thus, dividing his army into separate columns and focusing on smaller engagements like skirmishes and sieges of small to medium forts provided him a means of systematically destroying the Persian-Armenian army while minimizing the risk to his own soldiers.

While Tacitus offers few details, the conflict was likely quite brutal and the brunt of the violence was most likely directed at civilians. Tacitus explains how the war unfolded after the premature offensive led by Corbulo's troops:

Tiridates meantime who, besides his own dependencies, had the powerful aid of his brother Vologases, ravaged Armenia, not in stealthy raids as before, but in open war, plundering all whom he thought loyal to Rome...So Corbulo, frustrated in his prolonged efforts to bring on an engagement and

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<sup>26</sup> *Apocalypse*, 185-87.

compelled, like the enemy, to carry hostilities everywhere, divided his army, so that his generals and officers might attack several points simultaneously.<sup>27</sup>

This deliberate, targeted violence against non-combatants was fairly common in ancient and medieval warfare. Vespasian and Titus would also rely on this strategy of systematic terror in their Judean campaigns a few years later. Faulkner provides a detailed description of what such a war would have looked like:

Vespasian's strategy was to fight a long war, each move carefully staged, avoiding undue risks, reducing the rebels bit by bit through a succession of skirmishes and sieges, while destroying their infrastructure and will to fight with a ruthless application of fire and sword to villages and farmland. It was to be a terrible war of attrition and annihilation... Vespasian chose Gabara to make an example. The village was stormed, its men massacred, its women raped and killed, and its buildings torched... Vespasian was applying the customary policy of fire and sword with deliberate purpose: either the enemy would be terrorized into immediate submission; or be forced to risk his forces in pitched battle in defence of territory; or have his logistical base systematically destroyed.<sup>28</sup>

It is worth noting that these attrition-based tactics were not new to the Principate Era. They had been a feature of conflict throughout Antiquity including the Republican Era. Julius Caesar openly admitted to burning farms and taking slaves during his campaign against a Gallic tribe called the Menapii.<sup>29</sup> The novelty of the strategy was its role in Rome's broader defensive strategy. As discussed previously, a key concern for Roman generals was preserving the integrity of their forces by avoiding unnecessary losses. Peasant farmers and unfortunate travelers on the road made for much less dangerous targets than armed enemy formations. As Faulkner also noted, attacking civilians and the economic infrastructure of the region forced local forces, such as the Armenians and

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<sup>27</sup> Tacitus, *The Annals*, XIII.

<sup>28</sup> *Apocalypse*, 187-88.

<sup>29</sup> Julius Caesar, *The Gallic Wars*. Book VI, Paragraph 6, Translated by H.J. Edwards (New York: Dover Publications Inc., 2006).

Jews, onto the defensive. This strategy also provided the Roman military with an indirect means of hurting their opponents by sapping their morale and destroying their supply bases.

After seizing Artaxata, Corbulo and his legions pressed further into Armenia, towards the city of Tigranocerta. By this time, Tiridates had fled with most of his forces and Vologases was still preoccupied with a revolt in his own lands. Thus, the Romans encountered minimal resistance in the form of guerrilla raids conducted by Armenians still loyal to the Parthian cause. When the Romans arrived at Tigranocerta, the gates were already open and envoys from the city had sent gifts as a sign of friendship. Corbulo therefore elected to spare the city. At this point, a Cappadocian prince named Tigranes came to Armenia, having been chosen by Nero as the best candidate to serve Rome's interests as king of Armenia. Several regions within Armenia were also parceled out to Rome's allies, as a reward for their support in the war. With the war seemingly won, Corbulo returned to Syria.<sup>30</sup>

That Corbulo stopped his campaign once he had secured control over Armenia is important. The objectives of the conflict were strictly limited to reasserting Roman control over its former vassal. Vologases had refrained from supporting his brother (mainly due to the rebellion occurring within his own country)<sup>31</sup> and the Romans saw no reason to needlessly provoke a response. They could instead be confident that Corbulo's thorough defeat of Tiridates forces had provided an adequate display of Roman power and would discourage any future Parthian interference in the region, at least for the foreseeable future. The projection of power and strategic positioning were the main goals

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<sup>30</sup> Tacitus, *The Annals*, XIV.

<sup>31</sup> Tacitus, *The Annals*, XIV.

in conflicts such as these. In conflicts between great empires, there is a delicate balance between humbling an enemy, and trying to destroy them. The latter path risks escalating a conflict beyond its original parameters and demands an incalculable commitment of men and resources. However much he might have been tempted to succeed where Crassus and Antony had failed, Corbulo knew better than to press his luck. He had won a series of respectable victories over Rome's great rival, re-established control over their vital buffer zone in Armenia, and had avoided significant casualties.

## Parthian Counterattack

Tigranes' rule over Armenia would be short lived. Around 62 CE, he launched what can only be described as an extremely ill-considered invasion of a Parthian client kingdom. It is possible he hoped that Corbulo's legions would come to support him or that Vologases was still engaged with the Hyrcanians whom he had been at war with during the course of Corbulo's previous campaign. In both cases he was mistaken. Vologases made peace with the Hyrcanians and raised an army to retake Armenia for his brother. Here is where one of Tacitus' most famous passages appears during the Parthian deliberation on how to respond to Tigranes' aggression: "It is not by weak inaction that great empires are held together; there must be the struggle of brave men in arms; might is right with those who are at the summit of power."<sup>32</sup> Tacitus ascribes these words to Tiridates, who is urging his brother to retake Armenia to protect their vassals and punish Tigranes. Whether or not he actually said this now infamous phrase is irrelevant. It remains a succinct explanation of the logic of emperors charged with maintaining a vast commonwealth of peoples. The defeat in Armenia at the hands of Corbulo could have been allowed to pass as an inevitable outcome of Vologases' preoccupation with the Hyrcanians combined with the overwhelming military response from the Romans. An attack on one of Vologases clients by a newly installed puppet ruler of Rome however, demanded a response. The vassals and nobility of the Arsacid dynasty required their own

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<sup>32</sup> Tacitus, *The Annals*, XV.



assurance that they would be protected from aggression by Rome and its proxies. As was the case with Rome, the ability to project power and strength were vital to the integrity of the Parthian empire and the legitimacy of the Arsacid rulers.

Corbulo sent two legions to reinforce Armenia, but ordered them to maintain a defensive posture rather than rush to Tigranes' aid. After a failed assault on Tigranocerta, Vologases received an envoy from Corbulo who warned him to abandon the siege or risk more direct Roman intervention. Vologases agreed to withdraw from the city and announced that he would send his own emissaries to Rome to settle the Armenian dispute. Meanwhile, Corbulo had sent a message to Nero requesting another general be charged with the defense of Armenia. For this task, the emperor appointed the singularly unqualified Caessenius Paetus. Paetus took three legions as well as several auxiliary cohorts and, according to Tacitus, planned to annex Armenia outright as a province of the Roman Empire. Paetus advanced rapidly into Armenia to lift the siege of Tigranocerta. However he soon found himself outnumbered and surrounded by Vologases' army at a place called Rhandeia. While Corbulo rushed to aid his besieged comrade, Paetus managed to negotiate a humiliating retreat on behalf of his army. Tacitus reports that they were forced to pass beneath the yoke as a sign of submission and that their haste to retreat was so great that they left their wounded behind. Upon linking up with Corbulo's column, Paetus suggested that they turn around and attempt to retake Armenia by surprise. However, Corbulo stated that he had no such orders from the emperor, that the terrain heavily favored the Parthians, and that Paetus' men were in no condition to continue the campaign. Paetus was sent back to Cappadocia while Corbulo hastily negotiated with

Vologases to remove his armies from Armenia while Corbulo agreed to remove the forts which the Romans had established there as well.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Tacitus, *The Annals*, XV.

## Negotiations for Peace

As the Romans were withdrawing from Armenia, the mood in Rome itself was celebratory. They had received Paetus' earlier reports exaggerating his own progress against the Parthians and ensuring that his campaign would deliver a swift and decisive victory. Furthermore, Nero and his new wife Poppaea Sabina were celebrating the birth of their first child together and a festival was thrown with games and other entertainment to honor the occasion. Thus, it was quite the shock when an emissary from Vologases arrived detailing how the Parthians had forced Paetus into a humiliating retreat and that Tiridates was willing to negotiate Armenia's client status with Nero. When these reports were confirmed, Nero and his councilors were unhesitating in their decision: reinforcements were sent to Syria, more troops were gathered from Rome's various Eastern allies, and general Corbulo was given *Maius Imperium*, complete military authority over the East. Corbulo advanced once more into Armenia, simultaneously sending emissaries to Tiridates and Vologases while he punished the Armenians, regardless of wealth or station, who had defected to the Parthians. Ultimately, both sides agreed to meet at Rhandaia to negotiate a peace. The Parthians wanted to remind the Romans of their previous defeat, while Corbulo wished to remove the taint of disgrace from the battlefield as well as to collect the Roman casualties in order to provide them with a proper burial. It was agreed that Tiridates would symbolically lay down his crown

before a statue of Caesar and would journey to Rome to receive a crown from Nero, thus confirming his status as a vassal of the Roman Empire.<sup>34</sup>

While Tiridates may have sworn an oath of friendship and vassalage to Nero and his successors, he was still the brother of Vologases and his kingship over Armenia greatly expanded Parthian influence in the region. Nero's acceptance of the peace agreement after five years of war begs the question: what was the purpose of the conflict, and what were Rome's ultimate goals? Neil Faulkner gives an excellent analysis of the nature of imperialist politics and competition. While Armenia did possess strategic and geographic value, he argues that another factor was of far greater importance: prestige. According to Faulkner:

In this struggle to maintain a balance of power, prestige was all. Each side had to inspire fear and confidence in equal amounts – fear to deter the enemy, confidence to inspire one's allies.

Achieving this was essentially a matter of prestige – a matter, that is, of an appearance of power.

Prestige fell and danger threatened mainly when others perceived a shift in the balance, a weakening of one side's power, a reduction in its ability to strike back effectively when challenged.<sup>35</sup>

As the author explains, neither the Romans, nor the Parthians, possessed the power or resources to conquer one another completely. The war in Armenia, like so many of the wars which had already been fought between Parthia and Rome, was about maintaining an acceptable equilibrium of prestige. On the one hand, neither side could afford to appear weak by allowing aggression to go unchecked. On the other hand, neither side wanted to become too deeply committed to a long, indecisive conflict which would

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<sup>34</sup> Tacitus, *The Annals*, XV.

<sup>35</sup> *Apocalypse*, 13.

demand ever greater investments in resources and manpower which could inflict lasting and very real weakness on both sides.

For Nero and Vologases, the Peace of Rhandaia was an acceptable compromise. Corbulo's march into Armenia in 63 CE and the fact that Tiridates and Vologases had accepted the terms laid out by Corbulo reassured the Emperor and his regional allies that Roman military supremacy remained intact and that the defeat of Paetus had not significantly altered the overall balance of power. It also allowed him to withdraw his legions from an expensive and seemingly unending conflict. While Armenia's strategic position was important, its profitability was negligible in comparison to Mesopotamia and the Eastern Roman provinces, neither of which were in serious jeopardy. Faulkner states that the appropriate "balance of fear" had been reached where both empires had properly demonstrated their military capabilities, to their allies as much as their opponents, and could now resolve their dispute without over-committing men and resources.<sup>36</sup>

Ultimately, while Arsacid influence in Armenia may have increased, the broader division of the spheres of influence between the two powers remained unchanged. Fergus Millar explains how the war over Armenia revealed the extent of Roman resources in the region and how the Romans maintained control over a frontier which was so distant from the center of power in Italy. Throughout the Julio-Claudian and the later Flavian period, the Euphrates was considered by both empires to be the not-quite official border between their respective domains. Corbulo's campaigns had mustered resources and manpower not seen in the Eastern Provinces since the civil wars of the Late Republic. However, as Millar explains, the primary purpose of these forces was intimidation: "In this period

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<sup>36</sup> *Apocalypse*, 13.

such large-scale concentrations of force in the East were not intended to achieve permanent conquest, and left undisturbed the presumption that the frontier of the two empires lay on the middle Euphrates.”<sup>37</sup> Armies in the East (and throughout the Roman periphery) were primarily a negotiating tool, a means to coerce allies into cooperating and threaten rivals like the Parthians with retaliation. This idea is supported by Edward Luttwak in his discussion of the Julio-Claudian’s defensive strategy and their overall lack of established frontier defenses (which we discussed earlier):

By avoiding the burden of maintaining continuous frontier defenses, that is, the dispersal of imperial forces over very long perimeters, the deployable military power that could be generated by the imperial forces was maximized. Hence, the total military power that others could perceive as being available to Rome for offensive use—and that could therefore be put to political advantage by diplomatic means—was also maximized. Thus the empire’s potential military power could be converted into actual political control at a high rate of exchange.<sup>38</sup>

The psychological and diplomatic impacts of Roman military power were the emperors’ greatest assets and they were crucial to maintaining the prestige which Faulkner described as being so crucial to maintaining control over the clients and border provinces as well as preserving an acceptable balance of power with the Arsacids.

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<sup>37</sup> Fergus Millar, *The Roman Near East: 31 BC - AD 337*. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 1993), 68.

<sup>38</sup> *Grand Strategy*, 19.

## Reactions to the Peace of Rhandeia

Tacitus provides great detail of the parlay between Corbulo and Tiridates. It is the archetypal meeting between two noble adversaries: the aristocratic general and the young prince. Tacitus' account of the meeting is a characteristic example of narrative spin. His main goal is to make his readers forget about the humiliation of Paetus by framing the peace agreement as being tantamount to a surrender for the Parthians (he refers to Tiridates as a "suppliant Arsacid," and states that he will go to Rome as a "spectacle to the world, little better than a prisoner"). Tacitus offers effusive praise for Corbulo for bringing the war to a close and representing Rome as both a general and a diplomat.<sup>39</sup> Overall, Tacitus generally seems to approve of the agreement reached at Rhandeia. If it is assumed that Tacitus' views were representative of the majority of the Roman elite, then it can safely be inferred that they too were relatively satisfied with the arrangement. The supplication of a Persian prince before the Emperor of Rome would indeed serve as a powerful symbol of Rome's continued hegemony. Nero's decision to make peace would be among the last of his choices that the Roman Senate agreed with.

For their part, the Parthians were likely more than satisfied with the Peace of Rhandeia. Vologases had kept his promise to his brother Tiridates and secured for him the kingship of Armenia. This secured a buffer between Rome's heavily militarized Eastern provinces and ensured Vologases would have a loyal ally should any more internal

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<sup>39</sup> Tacitus, *The Annals*, XV.

rebellions arise as had happened during the conflict with the Romans. As Faulkner notes, Vologases had spared Paetus' army from annihilation when he had him surrounded at Rhandeia.<sup>40</sup> This suggests that Vologases had long been hoping for a peaceful settlement. The complete destruction of a Roman Army would have only escalated the conflict. While there are no primary sources from Persian authors detailing the general feelings of the various satraps and clients towards the peace agreement, the best evidence for the Parthian's general satisfaction with the agreement was that, in the roughly fifty years between the reigns of Nero and Trajan, the Parthians never attempted any serious incursion into Roman territory. Despite the opportunities provided by the Great Jewish Revolt and the Year of the Four Emperors, the Parthians did not make any move to take advantage of the chaos unfolding within Rome's borders. As Faulkner once again notes, Rome's military resources and the entrenched Hellenic culture of the Eastern provinces meant that Armenia was the realistic limit of Parthia's sphere of influence in the west.<sup>41</sup>

Another reason the Parthians may have been so quick to accept the peace agreement was the threat of invasion. According to T.E.J. Wiedemann, around the time that Corbulo was marching to confront Vologases and Tiridates, the Romans and Parthians both received word that the nomadic Alani peoples were on the move.<sup>42</sup> While the problem of nomadic migrations would not seriously impact the Romans until the Fourth and Fifth Centuries, it was likely an acute fear for the Parthians, whose northern frontier bordered the steppes of Central Asia, home to the Alani and various other warlike pastoral nomads.

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<sup>40</sup> *Apocalypse*, 14.

<sup>41</sup> *Apocalypse*, Faulkner, 13.

<sup>42</sup> *The Cambridge Ancient History*, 248.



Armenians too were likely supportive of the peace agreement, mainly due to the fact that it meant an immediate end to the violence and the scorched earth tactics which ancient armies so often employed to terrorize local populations into submission. As was previously discussed, both Corbulo and Tiridates' armies had targeted the lands of those Armenians suspected of harboring loyalties to the opposite side. There are no estimates or figures for the total human and financial cost of the war on Armenia but after nearly five years of conflict there were likely few areas which were unaffected. Due to Armenia's previous status as a satrapy of the Achaemenid Empire, Parthian rule was likely somewhat more familiar. Even Tacitus admits that most Armenians generally preferred to be aligned with or ruled by the Parthians, though he ascribes this to their "ignorance of freedom."<sup>43</sup> Given Armenia's military weakness and poverty, at least relative to its two superpower neighbors, the best they could hope for was a peaceful status quo to which both sides were generally satisfied.

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<sup>43</sup> Tacitus, *The Annals*, XIII.

## Conclusion

Nero is often (justifiably) condemned as one of Rome's worst emperors.

However, the Peace of Rhandaia was one of his greatest achievements. The peace agreement settled the Armenian question and brought fifty years of unbroken peace between the Romans and Persians, one of the longest periods of peace which would ever exist between the two empires. While Nero's domestic policies, specifically his seizure of property and increases in tax rates, ultimately doomed his regime, his handling of the war in Armenia was a direct continuation of the policies of Augustus and allowed the Romans to continue consolidating their control over the Eastern provinces. Since the Varian Disaster, wars fought under the Julio-Claudians were limited in scope and generally aimed to demonstrate Roman power and maintain Roman prestige in the eyes of allied kings and nobles. Stability and security were the new main objectives in Rome's foreign policy.

Even after Nero's death, his successors, most notably the Flavians, maintained the Peace of Rhandaia and continued the Augustan defense policy. It was under Trajan that the temptation of conquest once again became too powerful to resist. Trajan would launch two massive invasions of Dacia (modern Romania) and Babylonia (modern Iraq and Kuwait) breaking the Peace of Rhandaia and forever altering the nature of Roman-Parthian relations. While Corbulo's campaigns in 58 and 63 CE had been limited to Armenia, the war launched by Trajan, and all subsequent wars between the Romans

and Persians, would be far larger and more destructive. The aim of the two superpowers had shifted from maintaining a stable balance of power to completely overpowering and excluding one another from the Middle East.

The wars between the Romans and Parthians in the Second Century CE and later between the Romans and Sassanians in the Third, Fourth, and Fifth Centuries would be fought on a far larger scale and would consume far greater amounts of wealth, resources, and manpower than Corbulo's limited campaigns of 58 and 63 CE. For all their faults, Nero and his predecessors in the Julio-Claudian Dynasty understood the limitations of Rome's power and the perils of overextending themselves. The prosperity and unchallenged power Trajan and his successors inherited gave them a false sense of invincibility which would ultimately draw them into an endless struggle with an evenly matched enemy at a time when Rome's fortunes were about to take a precipitous decline.

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