



CIRCESIUM

CIRCESIUM (Gk. Kirkēsion), a Roman border fortress in Mesopotamia (cf. Papyrus Dura, no. 60), on the spit of land formed where the Kābūr (Lat. Abora), the present-day al-Boşayra, flows into the Euphrates (see maps in Kettenhofen). In the inscription of Šāpūr I on the Ka'ba-ye Zardošt at Naqš-e Rostam (ŠKZ) the town is listed among those taken by Šāpūr from the Romans in the second campaign, against Philip the Arab, in 256 c.e. (?; Kettenhofen, p. 81); here the Greek version (l. 17) has Korkousiōna and the Parthian (l. 8) Krksy' (ed. Maricq, pp. 310-11, 338; ed. Back, p. 303). In Arabic it is called Qarqīsīā and in Syriac Qarqūsyōn (see Honigmann and Maricq, p. 153, on the Roman name; Weissbach, p. 505, gives other literary forms of the name; on the earlier history of Circesium, see Weissbach, pp. 505-06). The site was of considerable strategic importance, and Diocletian extended and reinforced it, in order better to withstand the Persians (Ammianus Marcellinus, 23.5.1; Malalas [= Magnus?], p. 329.8-9, tr. Jeffreys, p. 179; Procopius, *De Aedificiis* 2.6.1-2).

Not far from Circesium (*Historia Augusta*, "Gordianus" 34.2), some twenty miles according to Eutropius (*Breviarium* 9.2.3), stood the cenotaph of Gordian III, who was killed at Mesikhe (Anbār) during his campaign against Šāpūr I in 244 (Maricq, pp. 306-07, 352-56; Honigmann and Maricq, pp. 111-22); it was still there when Emperor Julian passed the site on his campaign against the Persians in 363. According to Ammianus Marcellinus (23.5.7), it was near the site of Zaitha (perhaps modern al-Marwānīya). Shortly before passing the monument, in early April 363, Julian had halted in Circesium and crossed the



Ḳābūr with his army by means of a pontoon bridge (Ammianus, 23.5.1ff.; Malalas, p. 329.8-9; Zosimos, 3.12.3, 3.13.1).

From the *Notitia Dignitatum* (“Oriens,” 35.12.24) it is clear that Circesium was the garrison site for the *legio IV Parthica* until the 5th century, when it was transferred to Beroe (cf. Theophylactus Simocatta, 2.6.9). During Justinian’s campaign to reorganize the system of border protection at the beginning of his reign (527-65), the old fortress was repaired and extended, as its walls had been partly undermined by the Euphrates (Procopius, *De Aedificiis* 2.6.2ff.). These measures may have been among the factors that led Ḳosrow I (531-79) to decide not to attack Circesium in 540; rather, he chose to penetrate the Roman empire farther upstream, along the western bank of the Euphrates (Procopius, *De Bello Persico* 2.5). The reestablishment of a strong fortress at Circesium probably made it possible also to build defense installations northward along the Ḳābūr toward Thannurium (Procopius, *De Aedificiis* 2.6.12ff. cf. Pauly-Wissowa, V A1, col. 1277) and then in a westerly direction as far as Rhesaina (Whitby, 1986, p. 727; see also maps in Kettenhofen). Under the reorganization of the military command structures, which were effected parallel to these measures at the border, Circesium became the headquarters of a *dux*.

In his campaign against Byzantium in 573 Ḳosrow I ordered his general Adormaanēs to cross the Euphrates near Circesium, in order to begin the devastation of the eastern provinces of the Roman empire from there (Ioannes of Epiphaneia, fragmented. L. Dindorf, *Historici Graeci Minores*, Leipzig, 1870, p. 379; Theophylactus, 3.10.6ff.; Euagrius, 5.9; Nicephorus, 17.38). Conversely, the later emperor Mauricius (582-602) made Circesium the base for his invasion of the Persian empire in 580 (Theophylactus, 3.17.5; Euagrius, 6.17; Nicephorus, 18.20; Whitby, 1988, pp. 257, 272-73).

Ḳosrow II (590-628) found refuge with the commander of Circesium, Probus, during his flight in 590, before Mauricius ordered him to move on to Hierapolis (Theophylactus Simocatta, 4.10.4; Whitby, 1988, pp. 296-97, map p. 301). In the Muslim conquest of Byzantine Mesopotamia, in 19/640, Byzantium lost Circesium, though it must have been recaptured subsequently. Only in the time of the caliph ‘Abd-al-Malek b. Marwān (r. 65-66/685-705, Gk. Abimelekh) was Circesium definitively captured by the Muslims, in 71/690-91



(Theophanes, *Chronographia* 363.32; cf. *EI*¹ I, p. 76). As late as the 4th/10th century Circesium (Qarqīsīā) was a thriving city with gardens, fruit trees, and fields of grain, as both Eṣṭakrī (p. 77) and Ebn Ḥawqal (tr. Kramers, p. 221) confirm (cf. Le Strange, *Lands*, p. 105).

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