



EUPHRATES

EUPHRATES, together with the Tigris (2,700 km in total length), historically and geographically constituting one of the most important river-systems in the Near East. Its significance to the history of Persia lies in it being one of the main trade and invasion routes between Persia and the Graeco-Roman world. Along its bank marched the Greek mercenaries who fought unsuccessfully for Cyrus (see CYRUS vi) in 401 B.C.E. (Xenophon, *Anabasis* 1.4-5). The Parthians created the province of Parapotamia with Dura Europos (q.v.) as its capital. In the Roman period the river formed the effective frontier between Rome and Parthia, especially after the defeat of Crassus at Carrhae (53 B.C.E.). The main crossing was at Zeugma (modern Bitlis)—the site of a Roman legionary base. The Upper Euphrates also constituted the frontier between Rome and Armenia with legionary camps at Satala, Melitene (and later Samosata) and was patrolled by cavalry cohorts along specially built roads. The kingdom of Commagene (q.v.) which bordered on the Euphrates (capital Samosata) remained an independent vassal state until 38 C.E. when it became part of the province of Syria and was later reconstituted as the province of Euphratensis in the Late Empire. Trade routes linked the Parthian capital of Seleucia-Ctesiphon with the main Roman cities of the Near East via Palmyra. The discovery of Palmyrene inscriptions at Ana, an island on the river, underlines the importance of the river as the main artery of trade.

The Euphrates loops westwards in Syria making it a poor choice as a frontline of defense for the Romans. This was amply demonstrated by the successful campaigns of Šāpūr I (q.v.) against the Romans. In his “first” campaign he



defeated the invading army of Gordian III at Mishike (241) which he renamed as Pirozshabur (Anbār, q.v.). From there he launched his attack along the Euphrates in his “second” campaign, capturing Dura Europos after a fiercely contested siege (ca. 256). Though the frontier was advanced to the Tigris under Diocletian, the Euphrates was nevertheless heavily defended as was the Chabur (Kābūr), one of its main tributaries (Ammianus Marcellinus, 23.7.3-6). The transportation of troops by barges along the Euphrates was a principal part of Julian’s strategy for his invasion in 363, but the resistance of the Persian garrison at Pīrozšābūr (Pirisabora) and at Maiozamalcha on the Royal Canal linking the Euphrates with the Tigris caused vital delay which affected the outcome (Ammianus Marcellinus, 24.2-4).

The loss of the Trans-Tigritanian provinces to the Romans after 363 meant that the Euphrates resumed its former role as demarcating the boundary between the Roman and Persian spheres of influence (Theophylactus, 3.10.2 ff.). It was the scene of a major battle in 531 (Procopius, *de bello Persico*, 1.18, 30 ff.) and in the years of the last Sassanian kings, and it was to Circesium, a major fortress on the Euphrates, that Chosroes Parwez (Kosrow Parvīz) fled in his bid to secure Roman help to restore his throne against Bahrām Čōbīn (q.v.) in 590 (Theophylactus, 4.10.4-5).

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