

# Theology on the Web.org.uk

*Making Biblical Scholarship Accessible*

This document was supplied for free educational purposes. Unless it is in the public domain, it may not be sold for profit or hosted on a webserver without the permission of the copyright holder.

If you find it of help to you and would like to support the ministry of Theology on the Web, please consider using the links below:



Buy me a coffee

<https://www.buymeacoffee.com/theology>



PATREON

<https://patreon.com/theologyontheweb>

[PayPal](#)

<https://paypal.me/robbradshaw>

---

A table of contents for *Bibliotheca Sacra* can be found here:

[https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles\\_bib-sacra\\_01.php](https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_bib-sacra_01.php)

historical records, the Juktanidae may have passed southward and adopted it, while the cognate Pelegites went into another region, and assumed quite a different linguistic character.

In so complicated a question it is well to proceed with caution, as, indeed, Professor Schrader, in the beginning of his Article, calls his investigation a tentative one. The attempt he makes to settle the question is able and instructive, and will lead, it is to be hoped, to further investigation.

---

## ARTICLE VIII.

### PARTHIA THE RIVAL OF ROME.

BY REV. SELAH MERRILL, ANDOVER, MASS.

#### 1. *Parthia as Connected with Judea.*

THE words, Parthia and Parthian, convey, even to the general reader of history, no very definite meaning. Parthia is thought of as some inaccessible mountain region of Western or Central Asia, and the Parthians as a wild, fierce tribe which inhabited the same. Can anything definite be known in regard to this country and people? The race—its origin, history, strength, civilization, and decay; the country—its geographical position, its physical features, and its resources; the empire in its rise and fall,—to fix and appreciate the place of this country and people, in the world-history; such topics, if it is possible for light to be shed upon them, ought to command our attention.

The subject before us, aside from its interest for the general student of history, is of special importance for those who propose to investigate thoroughly the history of New Testament times. The generations to which Christ and Herod the Great respectively belonged, had vivid impressions of this, to us, strange, half-mythical race. They had seen their swarms of mounted warriors. They knew something of their terrible power. In the year 40 B.C. the Parthians had literally driven the Romans from Asia. Their hordes, chiefly mounted men, had swept over Syria like a cloud of locusts. Their army pushed southward, a part of it, under Pacorus, proceeding along the coast to Ptolemais and Mount Carmel, and the rest, under Barzaphernes, went down inland through Galilee. Jerusalem was taken and plundered, with the country lying about it.<sup>1</sup> They settled Jewish politics in the most summary way. They placed Antigonus upon the throne of Judea. This prince, the last of the Asmonean princes, held the capital for three years, B.C. 40-37, "as a Parthian satrap, the creature and dependent of the great monarchy on the further side of the

<sup>1</sup> Josephus, Ant. 14. 13. 9.

Euphrates." Still earlier, in B.C. 53, Crassus, who (in B.C. 55) had made his name odious in Judea by robbing the Temple of ten thousand talents in gold and silver, and carrying off one huge ingot of gold besides, prepared to advance against the Parthians. The Parthians sent ambassadors to him to ascertain "if this is Rome's or Crassus' war." Crassus, stung by the question replied: "I will answer you in Seleucia." The chief of the ambassadors, striking the palm of one hand with the fingers of the other, said: "Hairs will grow here, Crassus, before you see Seleucia!" But the proud Roman pushed on, only to meet with disaster and death. His splendid army was crushed like an egg-shell.<sup>1</sup> Again, in A.D. 36 (or early in A.D. 37), Vitellius, the governor of Syria and Artabanus II. (Arsaces XIX. A.D. 14-44), king of Parthia, had a meeting on the Euphrates, at which a peace was concluded between the two empires. Here we find Herod Antipas, the civil ruler to whom Christ was subject, present as an ally of the Roman governor. The meeting was held in the middle of the river Euphrates, on a bridge of boats built for this purpose. After the peace was concluded Herod Antipas, thoroughly after the manner of the Herods, had a magnificent tent erected where he made a feast to the Parthian king and the Roman governor with their attendant officers. A curious fact connected with this event was, that Herod Antipas, quite in the style of a modern reporter for the New York Herald or Tribune, sent off private posts with letters, to the emperor Tiberius, giving him full particulars of the event and of the terms of peace agreed upon, which arrived some time before the dispatches of Vitellius. Vitellius never could forgive Antipas for this piece of smartness. Some time previous to A.D. 38, Izates, king of Adiabene, a province of Parthia, embraced Judaism. We find at his court a Jewish missionary from Galilee named Eleazar. Izates sent five of his sons to Jerusalem to be educated in the language and learning of the Jews. His mother, Helena, who had also embraced Judaism, visited Jerusalem in A.D. 41, intending to reside there permanently, and while there was able to relieve the severity of the famine which then, or soon after, afflicted Judea, by purchasing with her own funds great quantities of provisions in Alexandria and Cyprus, which she had brought to Jerusalem and distributed among the suffering people.<sup>2</sup> The Jews never forgot the generous conduct of the queen and her son. The Jewish element in the population of the Parthian empire was one of recognized importance. In the different provinces they had numerous and flourishing colonies. The offerings made by them for the temple at Jerusalem amounted to vast sums, and were taken thither under an escort of "many ten thousand men."<sup>3</sup> Parthians were present on the Day of Pentecost.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Florus gives him eleven legions, Plutarch seven, and Appian raises his entire force to 100,000 men.

<sup>2</sup> Josephus, Ant. 20. 2-4.

<sup>3</sup> Josephus, Ant. 16. 6. 1; 18. 9. 1.

<sup>4</sup> Acts ii. 9.

Josephus wrote his "History of the Jewish War" in Aramaic, for the special information of the Jews "who were beyond the Euphrates."<sup>1</sup>

These hints are sufficient to show that the history of Parthia was connected, in many ways, with that of Judea at the time of Christ.

We shall attempt to give a brief sketch of the country and people of Parthia, founded chiefly upon the excellent work of Professor George Rawlinson,<sup>2</sup> using such other helps as may be at our command. A connected history of Parthia did not exist;<sup>3</sup> but, scattered through many ancient writers were numerous notices of this country and people, and modern researches have added something further to the materials out of which such a history might be constructed. The task of working up these materials has fallen into capable hands, and "The Sixth Oriental Monarchy" is one of the most valuable historical works of our times.

## 2. *The Geographical Position of the Country, its Climate, and Resources.*

If one would fix definitely in his mind the position of Parthia, he must examine some recent and reliable map of Central and Western Asia. A complete map of this country is yet to be made. Ancient Parthia lay east and southeast of the southeast extremity of the Caspian Sea. The Elbarz mountains, which begin in Armenia, sweep entirely around the southern end of this sea, and when near its southeast angle they bend to the north, and continue so for about four degrees of longitude, when they bend to the south, and continue slightly so for about four degrees more, when their course is easterly again. Thus this range for about eight degrees of longitude forms a sort of half-moon, which opens towards the south. The southern exposure of this mountain range sinks down into foot hills, and these into a belt of plain country, which, in turn, meets the Great Salt Desert. This belt is, perhaps, three hundred miles long; and varies in width from two to ten or fifteen miles. By a system of irrigation this belt, or "skirt" as it is called, was made very fertile. It is said to be "strewn with the ruins of magnificent cities."<sup>4</sup> This belt and the southern slope of these mountains was the original seat of the Parthian empire.

<sup>1</sup> Wars, Preface, 2.

<sup>2</sup> The Sixth Oriental Monarchy; or the Geography, History, and Antiquities of Parthia, collected and illustrated from ancient and modern sources, by George Rawlinson, M.A. 1 vol. 8vo. London: Longmans, Green, and Co.; New York: Scribner, Welford, and Armstrong. 1873.

<sup>3</sup> In English at all events. The Germans had C. F. Richter's "Historisch-kritischer Versuch über die Arsaciden-und Sassaniden-Dynastie," Göttingen, 1804. In some respects a valuable work. We would refer also to the long and able Article in Ersch und Gruber's "Encyclopädie," entitled "Parther" (see also "Parthien"), pp. 376-417. Ersch und Gruber give a valuable review of the literature of the subject, including the Greek, Roman, Oriental, and modern.

<sup>4</sup> Rawlinson, Herodotus, iv. 163 (American edition).

In the Elburz range, directly south of the southern extremity of the sea, is the volcanic cone of Demavend, the snowy summit of which is 14,800 feet above the sea-level. After the southeastern angle of the sea is passed the range broadens out into a mountainous region, or rather becomes four or five distinct ranges of moderate elevation, running mostly parallel to one another, with fertile valleys intervening. Further towards the east these ranges contract, and push on still eastward till they meet the Hindoo Koosh. The Great Salt Desert, already spoken of as lying south of this region, is about 400 miles long by 250 broad, and comprises something like 100,000 square miles. North of these ranges of mountains is the great desert of Khiva or Kharesm. This stretches northward 800 miles to the foot of the Moughojar hills, and eastward an equal distance to the neighborhood of Balkh.<sup>1</sup> This region of mountains and valleys lying thus between these two frightful deserts, is about 200 miles from north to south, and 320 from east to west, comprising between 60,000 and 70,000 square miles. But if from this district, Hyrcania, which lay to the west and northwest of Parthia Proper, and bordered upon the Caspian, be cut off, the latter would be reduced to about 33,000 square miles. Besides the vast southern exposure, already spoken of, which has its own watercourses, there is a northwestern exposure with its streams, and towards the east the streams flow slightly in that direction also. The vast desert of Khiva, lying to the north of Parthia, has neither animal life nor vegetation. "It exhibits the image of death, or rather of the desolation left behind by a great convulsion of nature."<sup>2</sup> Humboldt thought this the bed of a sea which once flowed between Europe and Asia, joining the Arctic Ocean with the Euxine. It is sandy and salt, and swallows up except in one or two instances, the rivers which attempt to make their way through it. "The Murg-ab, the Heri Rud, the river of Meshed, and various minor streams, are lost in the sands." This desert "separates more effectually than a water-barrier between the Russian steppes and the country of Khorasan, and lies like a broad, dry moat outside the rampart of the Elburz range." The valleys, between the ranges of mountains just described, are extremely rich and fertile, and in some sections the mountain slopes are well wooded. The whole region is well watered; there are numerous small streams, and some rivers of considerable size. And on the slopes and plain country, which meet the desert on either side, a system of irrigation by canals and underground watercourses kept the soil, in former times, in a state of surprising fertility. This region still produces the pine, ash, poplar, willow; walnut, sycamore, mulberry, apricot, vine, "and numerous other fruit trees."<sup>3</sup>

In the western part "the slopes are covered with forests of elms, cedars, chestnuts, beeches, and cypress-trees." The rich alluvial belt along the

<sup>1</sup> Rawlinson, Herodotus, i. 437.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Note, quoted from Mouravieff.

<sup>3</sup> Parthia, p. 7.

southern shores of the Caspian (300 miles long by five to thirty in width) abounded in tropical and other fruits, and this particular district is spoken of as "one continuous garden."<sup>1</sup> But in Parthia itself, the soil was suitable for wheat, barley, and cotton. Game abounded in the mountains, and fish in the streams. "Among the mineral treasures of the region may be enumerated copper, lead, iron, salt, and one of the most exquisite of gems, the turquoise."<sup>2</sup> As to the climate, the winters are not severe, although cold weather continues from October to March, with considerable snow; nor is the heat intense in summer. The descriptions already given have been confined chiefly to Parthia Proper. Yet we can hardly form any correct estimate of such a limited section of country without including the countries which immediately surrounded it. These were: Chorasmia, Margiana, Aria, Sarangia, Sagartia, and Hyrcania. Chorasmia upon the north, was a poor country, and never could have maintained more than a sparse and scanty population. Margiana lay northeast upon the Murg-ab, and by skilful irrigation this small tract was made one of the most fertile of all known regions. This district was especially famous for its vines, of the clusters of which Strabo has given marvellous accounts. South of Margiana, and touching Parthia upon the east, was Aria, a district resembling Parthia in its general features. To the southeast and south of Parthia lay Sarangia and Sagartia, both rather unproductive countries. To the west and northwest lay Hyrcania, with which Parthia was geographically more closely connected. This district, bordering upon the eastern shores of the Caspian sea, was the richest of all the provinces by which Parthia was surrounded. "Here, on the slopes of the hills, grow the oak, the beech, the elm, the alder, the wild cherry; here luxuriant vines spring from the soil on every side, raising themselves aloft by the aid of their stronger sisters, and hanging in wild festoons from tree to tree; beneath their shade the ground is covered with flowers of various kinds; primroses, violets, lilies, hyacinths, and others of unknown species; while in the flat land at the bottom of the valleys, are meadows of the softest and the tenderest grass, capable of affording to numerous flocks and herds an excellent and unfailing pasture. Abundant game finds shelter in the forests, while towards the mouths of the rivers, where the ground is for the most part marshy, large herds of wild boars are frequent — a single herd sometimes containing hundreds. Altogether Hyrcania was a most productive and desirable country, capable of sustaining a dense population, and well deserving Strabo's description of it as "highly favored of heaven."<sup>3</sup> The geographical position of Parthia was remarkable. It was isolated, almost cut off, from the rest of the world on the north and south, but with outlets to the east and the west, the latter, a narrow one through the "Caspian Gates." It had sufficient and unusual resources within itself. It was a fit training place for a people that was destined, when it should

<sup>1</sup> Rawlinson, Herodotus, i. 437.

<sup>2</sup> Parthia, p. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Parthia, pp. 12, 13.

reach its maturity, not only to become the leading nation of Western Asia — ruling for five centuries from the Indus to the Euphrates, — but to make Rome tremble even in the days of her strength.

### 3. *The People a Scythic Race.*

We understand their proper home to have been, in general, the southern flank of the Elburz range, — the inside of the half-moon already described. They are placed here by Herodotus and the historians of Alexander, also by Strabo and Pliny. They did not gain this country by conquest. They were a Scythic (or, as sometimes called, Turanian) race, and this region is their original home, so far as it can be located by history. Yet, according to the geography of the Zendavesta, they were surrounded by Arian settlements or states.<sup>1</sup> They were conquered by the Arian race and held in subjection for five centuries, but, at length, by an uprising of the whole people, they gained their independence, which they maintained for nearly five centuries more, or from B.C. 256 to A.D. 226. Their Scythic character is shown: 1. by the testimony of ancient writers; 2. by their manners and customs; and 3. by the character of their language.

### 4. *The Parthian Empire.*

We have seen that the original home of the Parthian people was a small region, southeast of the Caspian Sea, comprising between thirty and forty thousand square miles. In B.C. 256, by an uprising of the whole people, the nation became independent of the Seleucidæ, or Syrian kings, who then ruled that part of the world. Some idea of the vigor of the Parthians may be gained by comparing their limited territory and numbers with the whole of the Syrian kingdom of which their country was a part. The Syrian kingdom extended from the Mediterranean to the Indus, comprising not less than 1,200,000 square miles, and it had besides abundant wealth and resources.<sup>2</sup> Three centuries previous to B.C. 256, this country had been conquered by Cyrus the elder. In B.C. 330 it was taken from the Persians by Alexander the Great. From B.C. 312 to B.C. 256, it was subject to the Seleucidæ or Syrian kings. From B.C. 256 to A.D. 226 — four hundred and eighty-two years — it was an independent empire. From A.D. 226 to A.D. 652 it was subject to the New Persian Monarchy, or kingdom of the Sassanidæ.<sup>3</sup> The empire reached its greatest limits under the reign of Mithridates I. (Arsaces VI. B.C. 174–136), who not only made extensive conquests, but organized the government on a wise and permanent basis. It comprised then an area of about 450,000 square miles, “which is somewhat less than that of modern Persia,” but, “unlike the modern Persia, the territory consisted almost entirely of productive regions.”<sup>4</sup> West of the Euphrates these people seem never to have made any permanent conquests. The

<sup>1</sup> Parthia, p. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Rawlinson, *Ancient History*, p. 624.

<sup>3</sup> Parthia, p. 33.

<sup>4</sup> Parthia, 79 et sq.

leader, under whom their independence was achieved, was named Arsaces. His successor assumed the same name, and became Arsaces II.; and this practice became a custom which continued till the close of the empire. The last king was Arsaces XXX. It is easy to see how this would have made utter confusion in Parthian history if the Greek and Roman writers had not had the good sense to preserve the real human name with the Arsaces number. An annoying parallel to this exists in England. In its four hundred and eighty-two years, the empire had thirty kings. Some enjoyed long and prosperous reigns. For instance, the sixth Arsaces reigned thirty-eight years; the ninth, thirty-seven years; the nineteenth, thirty years; and the twenty-seventh (Vologeses III.), forty-three years. Artabanus III. (Arsaces XXX.) under whom the empire came to an end, was among the most able of the later Parthian monarchs; but his Persian antagonist (Artaxerxes) was a leader possessing true military genius, and the Parthian empire, without any marked symptoms of decay, submitted to him as its conqueror. The empire had been broken, to some extent, by internal dissensions, and the character of the soldiery had gradually declined. But the race was by no means exhausted; for this same Artabanus, in the early part of his reign (A.D. 217) had defeated Macrinus and his legions in a three days' battle at Nisibis. This battle is described as "the fiercest and best-contested which was ever fought between the rival powers" of Parthia and Rome.<sup>1</sup> Artabanus accepted from the Romans a pecuniary compensation for his wrongs. Macrinus had to pay a sum exceeding a million and a half English pounds. "Rome thus concluded her transactions with Parthia, after nearly three centuries of struggle, by ignominiously purchasing a peace."<sup>2</sup> The disgrace was concealed from the Roman people by the fiction that the payment was by way of presents to the Parthian monarch and his lords.

##### 5. *The Government and Civil Affairs.*

Their civil institutions possessed great simplicity. There was a Senate, comprising both the spiritual and the temporal chiefs of the nation — the *sophi*, or "wise men," and the *magi*, or "priests." Then there was a body consisting of the full-grown males of the Royal house. These two bodies were the king's permanent councillors. Together they constituted the *megistanes*, i.e., the "nobles," or "great men." The monarch must be elected from the house of the *Arsacidae*. Although the concurrent vote of both bodies just mentioned was necessary to the appointment of a new king, yet when once elected his power seems to have been nearly despotic. When elected the diadem was placed upon the monarch's head by the "Surena," or commander-in-chief, of the Parthian armies. The "magi" became, towards the close of the empire, very numerous and powerful. They enjoyed unusual privileges, and were feared and venerated by all

<sup>1</sup> Parthia, p. 358.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p. 360.

classes of the people; and further, they served as a check upon the arbitrary power of the monarchs. Subject countries were allowed to retain their own kings and systems of government, so long as they remained loyal to Parthia; and, by way of distinction, the Parthian monarchs gave themselves the title of "king of kings," which is very frequent upon their coins.<sup>1</sup> Favors were granted to the Jewish colonies, and, especially, to the Greek towns in the empire. The latter enjoyed such privileges that in some cases they became independent communities, over which the Parthian kings exercised little or no control. As to the Parthian Court, the accounts are not very clear. It was a Circuit Court, migrating at different seasons of the year to different cities of the empire. The choice of cities seems to have been determined, to some extent, by climate. The court had a spring, a summer, and a winter residence; and tradition has preserved accounts of the splendor of the court and of the pomp and grandeur of the Parthian monarchs, which reports must be greatly reduced before they can be believed.<sup>2</sup>

#### 6. *Their Military System.*

The Parthians were essentially a warlike people. Their army consisted chiefly of mounted warriors. They had foot soldiers, but this arm of the service was of small account. Native Parthian troops formed the main reliance of the army, but these were aided by contingent foreign forces. In their "heavy horse" the men were protected by coats of mail, and the horses by a defence of scale armor. In the "light horse" neither men nor horses had armor, nor did the men carry spears. They were carefully trained to the management of the horse and the bow. "The archer delivered his arrows with as much precision and force in retreat as in advance, and was almost more feared when he retired than when he charged his foe"; a fact to which the Roman writers often called attention. Every effort was made to improve the cavalry, for upon its efficiency depended the issue of battle. Their tactics were simple: "To surround their foe, to involve him in difficulties, to cut off his supplies and his stragglers, and ultimately to bring him into a position where he might be overwhelmed by missiles, was the aim of all Parthian commanders of any military capacity." In battle the attack of the heavy cavalry was furious. "The mailed horsemen charged at speed, and often drove their spears through the bodies of two enemies at a blow."<sup>3</sup> The light horse was always in motion in presence of an enemy; but the heavy cavalry were so trained as to stand "firm as an iron wall against the charges that were made upon them."<sup>4</sup> The Parthians were bad hands at sieges, and gen-

<sup>1</sup> Parthia, p. 88.

<sup>2</sup> Parthia, p. 94. For evidence of the final decline of the power of the "magi," see pp. 365 and 400.

<sup>3</sup> Parthia, pp. 404-410.

<sup>4</sup> Parthia, pp. 160, 161.

erally avoided them. The Romans might overrun a portion of their territory, but they could seldom hold it long; and it was not possible for them to retire from Parthian soil without disaster. Clouds of Parthian horse would hang upon the retreating columns, and almost ruin them. Of the six great expeditions of Rome against Parthia, one only, that of Avidius Cassius (A.D. 163-165), was entirely successful. In every other case, either the failure of the expedition was complete, or the glory of the advance was tarnished by disaster and suffering during the retreat.<sup>1</sup> Many of the details of the connection of Parthia with Rome are of unusual interest, but we have not space to give them here. The policy of Rome was profoundly influenced by the existence of Parthia, its formidable neighbor. When Crassus was defeated and the Parthian hordes began to push westward, it looked, for a time, as if Rome was to have a master. It cost Rome a general (Crassus) and a splendid army before she would admit Parthia as her rival. Yet impartial history presents the Parthian empire to us as for three centuries "a counterpoise to the power of Rome," — "a rival state, dividing with Rome the attention of mankind and the sovereignty of the known earth."<sup>2</sup> Some of the best generals of the Roman empire measured swords with the Parthian monarchs, and were worsted in the encounter. The three days' battle of Nisibis, already referred to, — fierce and bloody enough, — was a fair trial of skill and strength between the East and the West, and in it the Asiatic army did not suffer, but gained in the comparison. Rome found that she could buy a peace (as she did here) better than she could furnish men and generals to conquer one. Yet her writers, too proud to chronicle the truth, endeavored to represent every disgrace and disaster as a triumph of her policy or arms. Notice their interpretation, already quoted in this Article, of this affair of purchasing a peace. Notice again their account of the affair of the standards which the Parthians had taken from Crassus and Antony. They were surrendered to Rome from policy, and not because Rome was the stronger, and could take them by force if they were not surrendered. The fact that the enemy held these standards was a sore one for the Romans, and their recovery "was celebrated in jubilant chorus by many of the Roman writers."<sup>3</sup> Yet they represented the return of these standards as an evidence of weakness in the Parthian king, and as an act of submission to Rome.

#### 7. *Their Strength and Power of Endurance.*

In this Scythic race we must not expect much culture or refinement. Compared with Western nations they were always a coarse, rude people. Yet in their national character there were inherent elements of strength. The fact that they resisted every effort of Rome to subdue them, and maintained their national independence for five centuries — existing for

Parthia, p. 407.

<sup>2</sup> Parthia, Preface, p. v.

<sup>3</sup> Parthia, p. 209, note.

three centuries of that time side by side with Rome, as a rival power, during her most flourishing period — would lead the historian to look upon them with respect, and to study carefully the causes of their greatness. Military science, as they understood it, was carried to great perfection. The spectacle of the small Parthian people matched against the forces of the vast Syrian empire (B.C. 256) and achieving their independence, is one which has but few parallels in history, and which commands our admiration.<sup>1</sup> We could refer also to the terrible defeat which Sidetes suffered from the Parthians (B.C. 128), when three hundred thousand men were slaughtered, as evincing the valor of the Asiatic soldiers.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the Parthians surpassed the Romans in the power of physical endurance. They could bear both cold and heat, and on long marches did not suffer from thirst like the Romans. Indeed the Romans reported that they made use of certain drugs to increase their ability of bearing thirst; when, probably, the only remedies employed, were habit and resolution, combined with hardy constitutions.<sup>3</sup> We shall not be just to history if we consider these people merely a wild tribe of the wild regions about the Caspian Sea. They were not that; they were a nation of character, of strength, and permanence.

#### 8. *Their Learning and Arts.*

*a. Literature.* — If they had a literature no remains of it have been preserved. Yet in business and diplomacy they constantly made use of writing. They had a perfect custom-house system, which required accurate records to be kept. A kingdom made up of so many separate governments and peoples would require a knowledge of several foreign languages. Among these we know that Greek and Aramaic were extensively used in the empire. Orodes (Crassus' opponent) was acquainted with Greek, and could enjoy a play of Euripides.<sup>4</sup> But there is evidence that towards the close of the empire the knowledge of Greek had nearly died out (A.D. 130).

*b. For writing material* they used linen at first, but about Pliny's time they began to make paper from papyrus, which grew in the neighborhood of Babylon, though they still employed, in preference, the old material.<sup>5</sup>

*c. Manufactures.* — Of these, perhaps, silks, carpets, coverlets, and linen cloth were the most prominent. The silks were largely used by the Roman ladies, while the coverlets, highly wrought, commanded extravagant prices, and were deemed fit adornments of the imperial palace at Rome.<sup>6</sup>

*d. Coinage.* — Their coinage had from first to last somewhat of a rude character, which is an indication that it is native, and not the production of Greek artists, as Lenormant, and Eckhel less decidedly, have claimed. The Parthian coins that have been preserved are quite numerous. Eckhel devotes twenty-eight quarto pages to the subject; and, since his time,

<sup>1</sup> Parthia, p. 50.

<sup>2</sup> Parthia, p. 105.

<sup>3</sup> Parthia, p. 408.

<sup>4</sup> Parthia, pp. 411, 424, 429.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.* p. 425.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* 426, and note.

many more coins have been found.<sup>1</sup> They bear Greek, Semitic, and even Arian (or Bactrian) legends.

*c. Architecture and ornamental art.* — The Parthians were not builders. "They did not aim at leaving a material mark upon the world by means of edifices, or other great works." Assyria, Babylonia, and Persia covered Western Asia with monuments of their pride and wealth; but the Parthians seem to have "affected something of primitive rudeness and simplicity in their habits and style of life, their dwellings and temples, their palaces and tombs." Yet they left sufficient remains to enable us to form a tolerably correct estimate of their general ideas of architecture, sculpture, and the other ornamental arts. The most extensive remains are found at Hatra, between the Tigris and Euphrates, an important city of the Parthian empire. Other remains were found by Mr. Loftus at Warka (the ancient Erech). Among them are columns, Ionic capitals, arches, and friezes variously ornamented. Their houses had windows; their palaces had large, lofty halls for public occasions, and extensive paved courts; and their tombs were cut out of rock or built of hewn stone in an elegant and costly style. Large numbers of coffins have also been found. These are "slipper-shaped," and are ornamented in various ways. A few bas-reliefs have been recovered. Also terra-cotta statuettes, earthen drinking vessels and lamps, copper bowls, glass lachrymatories, jugs, jars, vases, and other domestic utensils, besides many personal ornaments, such as armlets, bangles, beads, rings, ear-rings, and head-dresses. The personal ornaments are made of gold, silver, copper, and brass. Tall, pointed head-dresses of gold are sometimes found. But art, especially aesthetic art, was not what the Parthian people excelled in. Their power lay chiefly in the direction of conquest and organization. In war, hunting, and government they excelled.<sup>2</sup>

#### 9. *Their Commerce.*

Their custom-house system, already referred to, indicates considerable traffic with surrounding nations. Then we learn from history that Parthia "imported from Rome various metals, and numerous manufactured articles of a high class." The costly silks, carpets, and coverlets which she exported to Rome have been already mentioned. She also exported spices, among which were bdellium, and the "odoriferous bulrush." Borsippa (the modern Birs Nimrud) was a centre for linen goods. And in B.C. 54 the Parthian flags were made of silk.<sup>3</sup>

#### 10. *Their Manners and Customs.*

Of these we can note but a few: *a. Polygamy* was common; *b. Adultery*

<sup>1</sup> Eckhel, *Doct. Num. Vet.*, 1795, iii. 522-550. See Loftus's *Chaldea and Susiana*, 212 (American edition). Parthia, p. 428, and note.

<sup>2</sup> Parthia, p. 371 et sq. See Loftus, all of chap. xviii. pp. 198-220.

<sup>3</sup> Parthia, pp. 425, 426, and note.

was punished with great severity; *c. Divorces* could be obtained without much difficulty; and it is noticeable that in this respect the women had equal rights with the men; *d. The position of the queen* was not much below that of her royal consort. He bore the title "theos," *god*, and she adopted the corresponding one of "thea," or "thea ourania," *goddess*, or *heavenly goddess*. The Parthian kings and court were remarkably free from the influence of women and eunuchs. In one case, however, a queen was known to take "the direction of affairs out of the hands of her husband and to rule the empire in conjunction with her son."<sup>1</sup> But women, for the most part, lived in seclusion; *e. Music and dancing* were accompaniments of their feasts; and of dancing it is said that the lower class of people especially were inordinately fond; *f. Hunting* was the favorite employment of the king and nobles. Game was very abundant,<sup>2</sup> and lions, bears, leopards, and tigers were the kinds considered royal, or alone suitable to be hunted by monarchs and lords; *g. Temperance*. In the earlier period of the empire the Parthian was noted as a spare liver; but later he adopted the habits of more civilized peoples, and indulged to excess in eating, and especially in drinking. A singular habit, not unknown at the present day, prevailed among them, of chewing citron pips to disguise their breath after they had been drinking.<sup>3</sup> Intoxicating drink was made from dates, and for this purpose the dates of Babylon were the most highly esteemed.

#### 11. *Their Sincerity.*

The Romans charged them with treachery and with being unfaithful to treaty obligations. The sentiment among the Romans is expressed by the sneer of Horace, "Parthis mendacior";<sup>4</sup> but this "is contradicted by the whole tenor of Parthian history." Except in the single instance of Crassus, the charge of bad faith cannot be sustained against them. They gave hostages freely from the members of their own families. They treated prisoners well; gave an asylum to royal refugees; and were scrupulous observers of their pledged word.

#### 12. *Their Religion and their Spirit of Toleration.*

Very little is known definitely as to the religion of the Parthians. They acquiesced in that mixed religion produced by the contact of Zoroastrianism with Magism, which prevailed from the time of Xerxes downwards. But this was not their own religion. Their actual worship, however, was offered to the sun and moon, to which temples were built and sacrifices were made. But, perhaps, the ancestral images which existed in every household received more divine homage than the heavenly bodies. The most that can be said is, that the Parthians were always lukewarm devo-

<sup>1</sup> Parthia, p. 414.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. pp. 53, 420.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p. 422, note.

<sup>4</sup> Hor. Ep. I. ii. 112; Parthia, pp. 411, 413, 426.

tees of the Persian religion, and were lax and changeful in their religious practice. To a great extent they were indifferent as to their religious faith. Hence we find them unusually tolerant of a variety of creeds among their subjects. In dependent Persia, Zoroastrian zeal was allowed to flourish. In the numerous Greek cities, the gods of that Pantheon had as safe a home as in the temples of Athens itself. In Babylon, Nearda, Nisibis, and wherever else there were Jewish colonies, the Jews enjoyed the free exercise of their comparatively pure and elevated religion. Within the limits of this empire, Judaism boasted many converts from the heathen, and here were found Jewish missionaries laboring without restriction of any kind. "Christianity also penetrated the Parthian provinces to a considerable extent, and in one Parthian country, at any rate, seems to have become the state religion. The kings of Osrhoëné are thought to have been Christian from the time of the Antonines, if not from that of our Lord; and a flourishing church was certainly established at Edessa before the close of the second century." And it is reported that many converts were found among the inhabitants of Persia, Media, Parthia Proper, and even Bactria.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Rawlinson says in conclusion: "The Parthians were, no doubt, on the whole, less civilized than either the Greeks or Romans; but the difference does not seem to have been so great as represented by classical writers. Speaking broadly, the position they occupied was somewhat similar to that which the Turks hold in the system of modern Europe. . . . They maintained from first to last a freedom unknown to later Rome; they excelled the Romans in toleration, and in liberal treatment of foreigners, they equalled them in manufactures and in material prosperity, and they fell but little short of them in the extent and productiveness of their dominions."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Parthia, pp. 398-402.

<sup>2</sup> Parthia, pp. 427, 428.