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## Parthian Empire (Arsacid Dynasty)

### *Political Structure, Foreign Relations, Culture, and Scientific Achievements*

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#### 1. Relations with the Romans and Armenians

The **Parthian Empire** (ancestors of the Tajiks, Persians, and Kurds), after consolidating its position in the East—particularly securing its eastern frontiers in regions such as Bactria and northern India—turned its attention to the western borders, which were under direct threat from the expanding power of **Rome** [1].

During the reign of **Mithridates II**, Parthian relations with **the Romans and Armenians** gained particular importance. With Mithridates' increasing influence in **Armenia**, negotiations took place between him and **Lucius Cornelius Sulla**, the Roman dictator, which culminated in a treaty [2].

According to this agreement, the **Euphrates River** was established as the natural and political boundary between the two great empires of the East and West. However, conflicts erupted between the Parthians and the remnants of the **Seleucids** and their **Armenian allies**, eventually ending in Parthian victory [3].

Shifts in regional power, Roman interference in Armenia, and the Parthians' reluctance to enter military alliances laid the groundwork for future tensions [4].

Among the most significant events of ancient military history was the **defeat of Crassus at the Battle of Carrhae (53 BCE)** by **Surena**, one of the most prominent Parthian generals [5].

This defeat showcased the Parthians' military strength and solidified their status in international politics [6].

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#### 2. Political Structure and Imperial Power

Unlike the centralized Achaemenid Empire, the Parthian political system was **decentralized and semi-federative**.

Although ultimate authority lay with the **Shahanshah (King of Kings)**, **local noble families** such as the **Surens** and **Karens** played significant roles in governing the realm [7].

The royal title was passed on **within the royal family**, subject to the **approval of the Megistanes Council (Mehestan)** [8].

There is historical evidence of **intermarriage within the royal family** to maintain legitimacy [9].

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#### 3. The Mehestan (Megistanes Council)

Known in Western sources as the **Senate**, the **Mehestan** was composed of **300 members**, including **Magi, noble families, and princes**.

This institution had a key role in **major decisions** such as selecting heirs, declaring war or peace, imposing taxes, and ratifying royal policies [10].

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#### 4. The Army

The Parthians **lacked a standing army** but could rapidly mobilize troops in times of emergency. The backbone of their military was formed by **light and heavy cavalry archers**. Military records also mention **border garrisons** and **permanent guards** [11].

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#### 5. Economy and Monetary System

Parthian coins—primarily **silver drachms and tetradrachms**—were minted in cities like **Seleucia, Hecatompylos, and Ecbatana**. Their standard weight ranged from **3.5 to 4.2 grams**, and they were used as the primary currency across the empire [12].

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#### 6. Culture, Art, and Religion

In the early Parthian period, **Hellenistic culture** was still influential. Parthian kings even used the title **“Philhellene” (Lover of Greeks)** [13].

Over time, especially from the reign of **Vologases I**, **Parthian language and Pahlavi script** replaced Greek on coins [14].

Parthian art was a fusion of **Iranian and Greek styles**, expressed through **painting, reliefs, ceramics, architecture, and music** [15].

Their architecture combined **Greek elements** with **Iranian traditions**, visible in structures at **Nisa, Ctesiphon, and Mithradatkirt** [16].

Their **sculptural art** emphasized **facade work and realism**, influencing **Sasanian and even Byzantine art** [17].

Religiously, Parthian beliefs were a blend of **Zoroastrianism, Greek deities, and local traditions**.

Gods such as **Ahura Mazda** were equated with **Zeus**, and **Mithra** with **Apollo** [18].

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#### 7. Music

Music had **social, religious, and military functions** in Parthian culture.

**Gōsāns**—musicians, singers, and poets—played a central role in transmitting **oral traditions**. Common instruments included the **reed (ney), tanbur, harp, lute, and daf (frame drum)** [19].

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#### 8. Science and Technology – The Baghdad Battery

Artifacts discovered near **Ctesiphon** (known as the **Baghdad Battery**) are likely from the Parthian era and indicate technological capability.

These objects may have been used for **electroplating gold**, producing **low-voltage electricity** using **acidic solutions** [20].

In the 20th century, companies like **General Electric** reconstructed these batteries and confirmed their functionality [21].

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