

Causality or Correlation: the Decline of Rome Due to the Sasanians

Nathan Decety

(University of Chicago)

Abstract: The existence of the Sasanian Kingdom is considered an important facet of the Roman Empire's downfall because it is believed the Sasanians were more competent or powerful than their predecessors - the Parthian Kingdom. This paper compares the total power of the Parthian and Sasanian kingdoms and concludes they are not dissimilar. In contrast, the total power of the Roman Empire decreased. Thus, I argue that while the Sasanian Kingdom contributed to the Roman Empire's downfall, its advent should not be seen as a major cause.

Keywords: Sasanian Kingdom, Parthia, Roman Decline, Latent Power, Bipolarity

Introduction

The cause of the decline and fall of Rome is multifaceted, complex, and subject to endless debate. Scholars argue the fall was due to internal collapse, to aggressive outside attacks, or to both (West 1932, 96-106; Piganiol 1950, 62-69; Jones 1955, 209-226; Heather 1995; Grant 1997; Gibbon 2001). One of the key sources of exogenous stresses upon the Roman Empire was the Sasanian Kingdom. The narrative of the relationship between the two polities is as follows: centered upon the Iranian Plateau, the Sasanian Kingdom (224-651 AD) replaced the Parthian or Arsacid Kingdom (247 BC-224 AD) as the main state adversary on Rome's eastern borders with similar geographical reach. The Sasanians were more powerful and organized than their predecessors, and aggressively attacked the Eastern Roman Empire. Their enormous power and continual assaults forced Rome to allocate substantial resources for its defense or for counterattacks. This not only prevented

the Eastern Empire from supporting the West at crucial moments, it also severely sapped the strength of the empire and stretched what was left thinly (Heather 2005, 61-2, 386; Decker 2022).

In this paper, I challenge this narrative by arguing that the strength of the Sasanian Kingdom is overstated and should not be seen as a primary cause of Roman decline. I do not claim that the Sasanian Kingdom did not contribute to the downfall of the Roman Empire - its aggressive and successful military activities are impossible to discount. But the claim that Rome needed to stretch its resources to breaking point in order to deal with the Sasanian threat is a testable hypothesis. If the Roman Empire was not faced with a significantly more powerful Eastern threat that did not in turn require greater resources, then the advent of the Sasanian Kingdom should not be considered a major initial cause for Rome's decline. The Sasanians represent noncausal correlation. The Roman Empire had no issue expanding and surviving while confronted with the Parthians. If the extant powers of the Sasanian and Parthian kingdoms are similar, then other factors must have weakened the Roman Empire and rendered it more difficult to handle what had already been a perennial threat. We will break this down into two hypotheses and determine if the evidence suggests one hypothesis is likelier than the other:

- Null Hypothesis: The Sasanian Kingdom contributed significantly to the fall of Rome because it was more powerful than the Parthian Kingdom.
- Alternative Hypothesis: The Sasanian Kingdom did not contribute significantly to the fall of Rome because it was not more powerful than the Parthian Kingdom.

The same idea can be expressed as a ratio of power whereby the ratio of Roman power to that of the Parthian or Sasanian kingdoms fluctuated. The null hypothesis is that the relative power of the Sasanians increased relative to that of the Parthians while that of Rome stayed the same. If the alternative hypothesis is likely, then the relative ratio of power between Rome and its Eastern rivals changed because Roman power decreased. For clarity's sake, let us express this relationship as:

If the power of the Sasanian and Parthian kingdoms, and Roman Empire were the same over time then,

$$\frac{P_P}{P_R} = \frac{P_S}{P_R}$$

Where P_P = Power of Parthian Kingdom

Where P_S = Power of Sasanian Kingdom

Where P_R = Power of Roman Empire

But, if we know that the relationship changed such that the Roman Empire struggled against the Sasanians such that,

$$\frac{P_P}{P_R} < \frac{P_S}{P_R}$$

Then, either P_S increased or P_R decreased, or both. If - as I argue, $P_S = P_P$, then the source of change in the ratio would be due to a change in P_R .

Determining the relative strength of the Parthian and Sasanian kingdoms can best be done by employing the tools of political science, especially of international relations. Specifically, by assuming that states operated in an anarchic world, their need for security should result in competition for relative power between states. The objective of conquest tends to be wealth or power (Lieberman 1993). Indeed, the state's *raison d'être* were almost entirely directed towards war until the late 18th century; the state organized society, returns from war, and security as its overarching purpose (Tilly 1985; Bayly 2004, 100-103, 248; Eloranta 2005; Brauer and van Tuyl 2008; Lacey 2015). According to the realist school, actual and potential (or latent) military strength is the manifestation of state power (Casetti 1984; Mearsheimer 2001). Actual power is represented by quantity, quality, and relative value (*vis a vis* main competitors) of military forces - such as cavalry or naval vessels. Economic strength and total population determine latent power - the material assets a state could transform into military power, of equipping and sustaining their armed forces (Hendershot 1973; Mearsheimer 2001).

This paper is organized as follows. We begin by comparing the latent and actual power of the Parthian and Sasanian kingdoms to suggest that their respective total power is approximately equal. We subsequently turn towards the Roman Empire to make a similar comparison of latent and actual power over time. This paper concludes by finding the alternative hypothesis more likely or - using the framework of ratios - that P_R decreased while P_P and P_S remained stable.

Latent Power Approximation

There are no clear and precise metrics for the economy or population size of the Sasanian or Parthian kingdoms. That said, we can approximate latent power using secondary data on population size. Population represents economic prowess; economic growth is a function of population growth and per capita production (Peterson 2017). Like all premodern civilizations, the economy of the Sasanian and Parthian kingdoms was predominantly agricultural, buttressed by trade (Jones 2018). Agricultural yield was such that only the smallest sliver of a population could be employed in other trades (including professional soldiery). The proportion of the population living in cities was 1-2% of the total population; between 50 to 90 farmers were required to support one man in a city (Davis 1955, 432). Production per person was low and roughly constant, no major innovations in production occurred during this time frame (3rd century BC - 7th century AD); changes in population require a proportional change in agricultural output for sustenance (Lucas

2004). What economic changes might be experienced are inextricable from population fluctuations (Scheidel 2008). In sum, the number of people represents the maximum economic heft of an ancient state. What may not be captured are more specialized resources necessary for war, such as iron and wood. However, the geographic expanse of the Middle East occupied by the Parthians and Sasanians had these materials in abundant supply (Oosthoek 1998; Qorbani and Kani 2005; Helwing 2021).

Focusing on population as a representation of latent power, we can compare the total estimated population of both the Parthian and Sasanian kingdoms to one another. Unfortunately, this is not simple task due to the lack of accurate census information. Likewise, there is no secondary research (that this author is aware of) that provides accurate time series of the population of the two kingdoms. Nevertheless, there are a few measures available which highlight the muted population changes over this time-period.

The first comes from estimates of total population and total population growth overall. Population growth was very low across the premodern world, including over the period under discussion (Scheidel 2004). Annual growth around 0 BC averaged around 0.037%, with an implied population doubling time of nearly 2,000 years (Livi-Bacci 2017, 7, table 1.1). A different estimate suggests that from 200 BC to 600 AD, the world population grew at a range of between 0 and 0.0623% (Kremer 1993, 683). The same pattern exists across other datasets (U.S. Census Bureau 2022). These growth rates hide considerable volatility: the population of continental Europe fluctuated from 41 million in 0 BC to 55 million in 200 AD, to 31 million in 600 AD; the population of Asia changed from 172 million in 0 BC to 160 million in 200 AD, to 136 million in 600 AD (Livi-Bacci 2017, 25, table 1.3). Diving in further, Clark estimates that the area which predominantly includes those held by the Parthian and Sasanian kingdoms boasted of a population of 20 million in 14 AD, 24 million in 350 AD, and 15 million in 600 AD (Clark 1967, 64, table III.I). Looking more closely at the modern day countries which include the imperial heartland of the Partho-Sassanids from 0 BC to 500 AD, the population increased from 4 to 4.83 million in Iran and from 1 to 1.05 million in Iraq (Table 1; see also Goldewijk et al. 2017). Available archaeological evidence which could provide more details is mixed (Shumilovskikh et al. 2017, 51).

It is difficult to claim with any certainty either that the total population of the Sasanian kingdom was far larger than the population of the Parthian kingdom at any specific moment as to give it a massive latent power advantage, especially over relatively short periods of time.¹

¹ Not only is there muted absolute change and low relative growth rates, much of the change in relevant populations does not necessarily correlate to Sasanian fortunes. For instance, the deepest strike by the Sasanian army was during the reign of Khosrau II, when the Sasanians reached Constantinople during the war of 602-628. That strike occurred right before their complete defeat at the hands of Heraclius (and the subsequent Arab conquest of Persia).

TABLE 1. Population of modern states that constitute the core of the ancient Parthian and Sasanian kingdoms; from 1000 BC to 600 AD, in millions (Goldewijk et al. 2017).

Year	-1000	0	100	200	300	400	500	600
Iraq	1.3	1.0	1.0	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.0	1.0
Iran	2.0	4.0	4.2	4.3	4.5	4.7	4.8	5.0
Afghanistan	1.0	2.0	2.3	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.5
Total	4.3	7.0	7.5	7.9	8.1	8.3	8.4	8.5

A final point worth discussing is the manner of organizing assets. A state more structurally effective and responsive can be assumed to have an advantage than a less agile one. Heather makes this point, arguing that the Sasanian Kingdom was more centralized and capable than the Parthians (Heather 2005, 61-62, 65). Closer analysis makes Heather's assertion contentious. It has been put forth, for instance, that "the Sasanian Empire should be considered a successor of the Parthian Empire on which a new dynast had been imposed via internal revolt" (Sauer et al. 2017, 242). Or more descriptively, Pourshariati writes,

"the Sasanians ruled their realm by what we have termed the Sasanian-Parthian confederacy. This was a predominantly decentralized, and [...] dynastic system of government where, save for brief and unsuccessful attempts at centralization by the Sasanians in the third and sixth centuries, the powerful dynastic Parthian families [...] were [...] co-partners in rule with the Sasanians" (Pourshariati 2008, 3).

Both the Sasanian and Parthian kingdoms were considerably less centralized and populous than the Roman Empire (McDonough 2013, part III). That said, the Parthian Kingdom is viewed as a highly effective and capable imperial power itself (Overtoom 2019). In other words, both the Sasanian and Parthian kingdoms were highly adapted to their local socio-geopolitical contexts and fielded similar operating models to govern and wage war and allocate resources to that end.

Actual Power Approximation

Two metrics are used to estimate direct actual power *quantitatively*: fielded army sizes and total army size. One metric, relative efficacy, is used to estimate army capabilities *qualitatively*. We focus on armies rather than fleets for two reasons. First, armies conquer and hold land (Hironaka 2017, chap. 2). Second, the wars between the Partho-Sassanids and Romans occurred almost entirely on land rather than at sea.

Secondary research suggests the total potential army size and actual fielded army sizes were quite similar between the Sasanians and Parthians. The standard large field army under both the Parthians and the Sasanians was around 50,000 (Olbrycht 2016, 295; Shahbazi). Both the Sasanians and Parthia could raise up to 120,000 soldiers for a short

campaign (Syväne 2015, 119; Olbrycht 2016, 310-3). Since empires don't tend to funnel all available assets into a single campaign, the total army size is also relevant. It is estimated that the total military potential of Parthia (once it established hegemony over much of the Middle East following Mithridates II's successful campaigns) and the Sasanians was just shy of 300,000 (Olbrycht 2016, 310; Overtoom 2020, 230). The core of the army, as will be noted further in this article, consisted of mounted warriors. These warriors were drawn from the warrior-nobles of the kingdom. Up to 100,000 men were available to Parthia as cavalry, including the royal guard, though 50-60,000 knights is a more reasonable approximation (Olbrycht 2016, 310; Farrokh 2017, 300). Likewise, the Sasanians had access to over 70,000 professional warriors (Farrokh 2017, 10). The royal guard is estimated to have amounted to 10-20,000 for both the Parthians and Sasanians (Syväne 2015, 119; Olbrycht 2016, 299-303; Shahbazi).

While the Sasanians and Parthians deployed similar strength quantitatively, the best metric to estimate actual power qualitatively should be relative effectiveness of military forces against rivals. The value of a military asset is based on its combat effectiveness against a foe because, "a piece of weaponry is only as valuable as it is potentially successful on the battlefield... a weapon's value can only be measured against its potential counter-weapon" (Pilkington 2023). We can expand this argument to the tactics, strategies, and organization of the army for war. While both Eastern kingdoms fielded excellent cavalry arms, the Sasanians fielded more capable armies that featured competent infantry and sieging units to rival those of Rome.

"The Parthians utilized a mixture of swift, light-armed horse archers and perhaps the most devastating and versatile heavy cavalry in the world in this period to outmaneuver and overwhelm their competitors. Since the Parthians' professional standing army was relatively small, they utilized their network of vassal kingdoms to raise necessary levies and share the military burden of controlling such a large imperial territory. The Parthians' developed a highly effective approach to warfare that allowed smaller, more logistically limited, and lighter-armed Parthian armies to resist and annihilate the more professionalized and heavier-armed armies of the Seleucids and Romans through speed, maneuverability, flexibility, and deception" (Overtoom 2019, 144).

The most valuable combat assets of the Parthians were their heavy lancers and mounted bowmen (Warry 1998, 207; Sheppard 2020). They were supported by infantry particularly useful for defensive operations (Olbrycht 2016, 305). In addition to their excellent heavy and light cavalry arms, the Sasanians also boasted of high-quality infantry and a siege arm (McDonough 2013, chap. XXVI, part III; Farrokh 2023a, 62-65; Cornuelle). The Sasanians effectively integrated not only infantry - particularly Dailamite (and earlier *paighan*) units but also various auxiliaries - into their operations in a manner the Parthians had not (Farrokh 2017, 18-20 and chap. 7; Farrokh and Moshtagh Khorasani 2020). Nevertheless, both kingdoms optimized for forces that could win battles and conquer, rather than long-term occupation of conquered territory (Hashim 2022, 84-85;

Farrokh 2023b, 195). These competency developments were somewhat offset by Rome's own evolution in unit types and tactics that nullified the Eastern cavalry advantage, especially following the series of disastrous (for Rome) military defeats over the 3rd century AD.

The Roman armies which faced the Parthians and Sasanians underwent significant changes from the late Republic through to the fall of the Western Empire. While Crassus' heavy infantry and close-quarters cavalry were decimated by their opponents in the 1st century BC, the armies of Maurice and Justinian featured large mobile cavalry units and archers particularly suited to combating their mobile eastern foes. The Roman tactics and equipment which won the Mediterranean were not as suited to plains dominated by cavalry (Parker 2000, 47-48). Even the most talented Roman late republic or early imperial commanders like Antony (36 BC) struggled against Parthian tactics. Maurice's *strategikon* (6th century AD) alone showcases the extent to which the Roman army had changed since the end days of the Republic in its focus on cavalry (Dahm 2016). The Battle of Dara in the 6th century AD was predominantly a cavalry engagement; the Romans integrated Turkic warfare methods in their military traditions by the 7th century (Bury 1958, 85; Farrokh 2017, 311).

Zooming out slightly, one notes that the method of fighting between East (Parthian and Sasanian) and West (Roman) evolved to favor a Roman style of war, one of engineering. The frontier between the empires became riddled with forts and fortresses over the course of late antiquity (Bury 1958, 94), over which the majority of chronicled fighting took place; strong points with large garrisons had to be captured and held. There is some evidence that the Sasanians depended on Roman resources to support their massive defensive works (Bury 1958, 10-11, 88). An army whose only strength lies in its mobile arm can struggle at blockading and seizing fortifications; the record shows the Sasanians were extremely skilled at the task, showcasing their infantry and sieging competencies. One notes that the Parthians often needed to mobilize less manpower than their Sasanian counterparts to fight the Romans in part because they did not need to capture the same number of fortifications but could fight in the mobile manner that suited their capabilities. In a sense therefore, the Sasanians evolved to build similar competencies as Rome (infantry and sieging) while the Romans developed their competencies to match eastern strengths - nullifying the earlier advantage Parthia held over Rome. The competencies of Rome and its eastern rivals converged over time.

Zooming out further to consider the record of battles and wars between Parthia and Rome and those of the Sasanians and Rome, there is likewise little room to suggest major capability differences. Let us note for instance the extent of invasions and raids of Roman territories. Part of the reason the Sasanians are described as dangerous rivals was the extent to which they were able to invade, raid, and capture Roman territories from their rise in the 3rd century AD to their end at the beginning of the 7th century. Yet the Parthians also

enjoyed considerable and, I would argue, comparable success.² Following the battle of Carrhae in 53 BC, the Parthians invaded Syria and besieged Antioch. A force was sent in the 40's BC deep into Syria to support first the Pompeians, then Cassius and Brutus at Philippi. The Parthians then invaded most of the Roman east (including Syria and Judea). The Parthians were defeated in the late 30's BC at the Syrian gates (Schlude 2012, 11-23); Marc Antony's subsequent offensive into the east resulted in a dismal failure (Sherwin-White 1984). Parthia in essence captured Armenia in the Roman-Parthian war of 58-63 AD. The Parthians once again ravaged Syria in the Parthian War of Lucius Verus (160's AD) (Schlude 2019). Under Mithridates II (1st and 2nd centuries BC), the Parthian Kingdom included all of the Tigris-Euphrates plain, Armenia, and parts of Iberia. Roman counterattacks were costly and often considered imperial overreach (see, for instance, Septimus Severus' expansion into Mesopotamia as discussed by Boatwright et al. 2014, 225, 246). About half of the wars between the Roman and Partho-Sasanian kingdoms before the fall of the Western Empire were between Rome and Parthia (Motin 2022, 187). At the height of its power, Rome only ever captured 20% of Parthia's territory (Sheldon 2010, 4). In short, the Parthian Kingdom was very capable of aggressive and deep military action.

Much of the difference between battlefield and campaign outcomes over the course of Sasanian and Parthian wars can be explained by differences in generalship, tactics, luck, and fortuitous circumstances (as also noted by Sheldon 2010, 40). The Roman disaster at Carrhae can be attributed to the many poor decisions made by Crassus (Frendo 2003, 71-81; Mattern-Parkes 2003, 387-396). Julian's ill-fated expedition (363 AD) was also doomed by poor strategic decisions, despite early tactical successes (Frendo 2007, 79-86). On the flip side, the dual battles of the Cilician Gates (39 BC) and Mount Gindarus (38 BC) which halted the Parthian invasion of the Roman east involved terrible tactical decisions on the part of the Parthians, namely the rush into battle without thoughtfully employing their cavalry arm. Finally, given that the fortunes of the Parthian, Sasanian, and Roman states were, to a great extent, subject to the quality of their ultimate leaders, and that the probability of having a good emperor or king was uncertain, then periods of success or failure can be partly attributed to chance rather than state capacity. Shapur I appears to have been an unmatched strategist and tactician whose activities lay the foundations for Sasanian success. Within the perspective of short-term conquest, the Romans were "lucky" to have had Trajan or Maurice and "unlucky" to have had Nero and Julian, the Sasanians were "lucky" to have Shapur II and Kavad I, and perhaps "unlucky" to have had Ardashir or Bahram IV.

² These campaigns are covered in detail by Sheldon 2010.

Roman Power

If, as I've argued so far, the actual and latent power of Parthia and the Sasanians were comparable, then the implication - as noted at the beginning of this paper - is that Roman power decreased. Unlike with the Parthian and Sasanian kingdoms, there is more discussion and evidence for Roman power. Like the Parthian and Sasanian kingdoms, however, there is no definitive source of information for either total population or military size. Based on secondary research, the total population generally appears to have declined, as did total military strength and the size of fielded armies.

There is a long tradition of debate surrounding Roman demographic decline. Some authors - such as Heather - argue that there was little sign of population decline or declines in agricultural yields. This is in part because evidence such as archaeological remains tend to be mixed and differ based on location. Palestine saw population growth in late antiquity, for instance (Bar 2004). Overall, however, the evidence across the entire empire overwhelmingly suggests factors like wars, mismanagement, a changing climate, disease, and famine devastated the population of the empire and damaged the economy, and that the decline began in the 2nd century AD, or perhaps slightly before (West 1932; Piganiol 1950; Russell 1958; Jongman 2007; Turchin et al. 2009). This decline severely and clearly impacted the Roman army (Boak 1955).

Just as we presented above, and using the same source of data, the population of modern countries which provided the core of imperial Roman demographic heft is used as a proxy for the total population of the Roman Empire. One particularly notes the reduction in population in Italy, Turkey, Egypt, Greece, Spain, and France in late antiquity (see Table 2). The contrast is stark - imperial heartlands of the Parthians and Sasanians grew slightly even as those of the Romans shrank by about 1/3 from 200 to 600 AD. Given that most of the empire was not exposed to Sasanian raids or conquest, that most of the empire reflects a pattern of reduction, and that decreases in population were relatively gradual and not precipitous, the diminution of population cannot be directly attributed to the Sasanians.

Turning to the imperial Roman army, that too appears to have decreased, though less drastically than the population of the empire. Following the conclusion of the civil wars which harkened the end of the Republic, Augustus settled 300,000 of his own veterans and maintained over 300,000 legionaries and auxiliaries to defend the empire (Dijkstra et al. 2015, 31). His opponent, Mark Antony, had fielded a similarly sized force. A century later under Marcus Aurelius, the Roman army approximated 370,000 (Dijkstra et al. 2015, 31). In the early 3rd century AD under the Severan emperors, the army size dropped to around 300,000 (Heather 2005, 63). By the end of the 3rd and early 4th centuries under Diocletian and Constantine, the army size averaged around 300-350,000 (Nischer 1923, 11, 48). It is in the following period that stark weaknesses appear. In the early 5th century, Valentinian III of the Western Roman Empire had - at most - 130,000 men; the army had shrunk by 25% between 395 and 420 alone (Bury 1920; Heather 2005, 248). Reinvigorating late

imperial field forces (i.e., *comitatenses*) often involved stripping border defenders (i.e., recasting *limitanei* as *pseudocomitatenses*) (Heather 2005, 247). Justinian's attempt to revive the empire through conquest in the 6th century AD, which overstretched eastern resources, depended upon a total army of around 150,000 and a massive treasury surplus inherited from emperors Anastasius I and Justin (Bury 1958, 78; Norwich 1988, 188-189).

TABLE 2. Population of modern states that constitute the core of the ancient Roman Empire; from 1000 BC to 600 AD, in millions (Goldewijk et al. 2017).

Year	-1000	0	100	200	300	400	500	600
Spain	2.0	4.6	4.8	5.0	4.8	4.5	4.0	3.5
Tunisia	0.5	0.8	0.9	1.0	0.9	0.9	0.8	0.8
France	2.0	4.9	5.7	6.4	5.7	5.0	4.7	4.5
Italy	2.0	7.5	7.1	6.7	6.3	6.0	4.0	2.0
Greece	1.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	1.8	1.5	1.2	0.8
Turkey	4.5	6.0	6.5	7.0	6.5	6.0	5.5	5.0
Syria	1.0	1.6	2.1	2.9	3.9	3.1	2.4	1.9
Egypt	2.0	4.0	4.3	4.6	4.3	4.0	3.5	3.0
Total	15.0	31.4	33.4	35.6	34.2	30.9	26.1	21.5

Fielded army sizes reflect a similar pattern of decay. The relatively large forces still fielded by the kingdom during the time of the Sasanian Kingdom do not appear to have had the same number of resources or to achieve the same level of strategic success as their forebears. The Romans may have lost over a million men over the First and Second Punic Wars in the 3rd century BC; spectacular losses in manpower almost seem common in this period (White 2011). Rome's ability to muster its population for war despite enormous losses is a major cause for its success and growth (Sekunda 1998, 133). In contrast, after their defeat at Adrianople (378 AD), in which an army of around 20,000 Romans was crushed, the empire was completely incapable of subduing the Goths (Heather 2005, 181-182, 212-213, 224-225; Eisenberg 2009, 112). The battle of Strasbourg (357 AD) likewise featured a Roman army of only about 13,000 (Eisenberg 2009, 109). Justinian's reconquests involved fairly small forces; the pivotal battle of Dara (530 AD) was won by 25,000 soldiers (Olshanetsky 2016, 19). Anastasius only had 15,000 men available when Kavad invaded at the beginning of the 6th century (Bury 1958, 12).

Rome's capabilities suffered - by the fall of the Western Empire, the army was incapable of defeating modestly sized enemies. By Heather's estimation, the Roman Empire was up against a cumulative 110-120,000 'Germanic barbarians' over the course of

the 4th and 5th centuries AD. Compare that to just the 20-year period ending the 3rd century BC: the Republic defeated the combined might of Carthage (Second Punic War: 218 s- 201 BC), the Macedonians (First and Second Macedonian Wars: 214-205 BC and 200-197 BC, respectively); the Illyrians (Second Illyrian War: 200-219 BC), and the Gauls (the Gallic invasion of Italy and Roman Gallic Wars: 220-191 BC, 225-200 BC, respectively). The Carthaginians alone could muster more than 100,000 soldiers - the remnants of Carthage's army which mutinied and attacked Carthage following the end of the First Punic War already amounted to nearly that number (Mercenary War: 241-238 BC).

Conclusion

Given the extraordinary complexity of a series of events as extensive, complex, and massive as the fall of the Roman Empire, establishing causality is difficult. The framework provided in this paper suggests that if Parthian and Sasanian power was approximately equal, then what changed over time is Roman power. The evidence provided suggests approximate parity between the Sasanians and their predecessors, suggesting the alternative hypothesis - that Roman power decreased - is more likely. A survey of Roman power buttresses the hypothesis that Rome's power declined. The decrease in Roman power suggests that the cause of Roman downfall is predominantly due to internal rather than external factors: when the barbarians invaded, Rome had weakened to the point at which it could not defend itself as well as before. In other words, the enemies were always at the gate, Rome just stopped being as capable at keeping it shut.

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