

**OPERATION CARRIED OUT BY THE ROMAN-BYZANTINE  
FLEET BETWEEN MARCH 5 AND JUNE 26, 363, DURING  
EMPEROR JULIAN'S CAMPAIGN AGAINST  
THE SASSANID EMPIRE**

*dr. Vasile MĂRCULEȚ\**

The spring-summer of 363 marked a new stage in the unfolding of the long conflict that opposed the Roman-Byzantine Empire against the Sassanid Empire. The Roman-Byzantine offensive, materialized in a large and vigorous combined campaign, on land and water, organized by Emperor Julianus Apostata (361-363), took place between March 5 and June 26, 363. The successes of the imperial forces brought the Parthian state on the verge of collapse. Only the unexpected death of the Roman-Byzantine emperor, following an injury received in the clash of Maranga (June 26) completely returned the result of the campaign, assuring the Parthians the final victory.

**Campaign preparation: ground forces and fleet.** Preparations for the campaign against the Sassanid state began in mid-summer of 362. In May, Julianus left Constantinople and settled in Antioch (July 18). Preparations lasted until late winter and early spring of the following year (5 March 363). The combined Roman-Byzantine campaign, against the Parthians, is reflected, in more detail or more briefly, in several contemporary or late sources. We do not insist on the presentation of the information transmitted by them, as this has already been done by a number of historians<sup>1</sup>. As far as we are concerned, we only specify the fact that most of them emphasize the account of the ground campaign, the operations undertaken by the Roman-Byzantine fleet being, very little or not at all, in their attention.

A small number of these historical sources provide us with a series of information about Roman-Byzantine fleet participating in the campaign. Some of them give us brief news about the number and types of vessels participating in the campaign, the role of the fleet, the military operations carried out by it or even the effective force of sailors. Others are limited to signaling the presence of the Roman-Byzantine fleet in the campaign against the Sassanid state. The effectives mobilized are not known exactly. The information transmitted by the sources we have is incomplete and partial it

---

\*Doctor in History; Mediaș – Romania; Independent Researcher, e-mail: [vasilemarculet@gmail.com](mailto:vasilemarculet@gmail.com)

<sup>1</sup>M.H. Dodgeon, S.N.C. Lieu, *The Roman Eastern Frontier and the Persian Wars (AD 226±363). A Documentary History*, Routledge, London and New York, 2005, pp. VII-XII.

refers only to certain components of the Roman-Byzantine army. For example, the church historian Philostorgius briefly records that Julianus left Constantinople and headed for Syria “with all his army”<sup>2</sup>. What were the effectives of Julianus’ “whole army”, the author does not specify. Some modern historians have attributed to the sophist Libanius the estimate of the imperial army, engaged in the campaign against the Sassanid Empire, at 100,000 soldiers<sup>3</sup>. However, such an attribution is without any foundation. In his works on Julianus' campaign in the East, Libanius makes no estimate of imperial forces.

In the second half of the twelfth century Michael the Syrian, the Jacobite patriarch of Antioch, recorded in his chronicle that Julianus attacked the Sassanid Empire “with 395,000 fighters”<sup>4</sup>. Moreover, from his account, it is clear that the total strength of the imperial forces was much more numerous because, he concludes, that the 395,000 fighters were “not counting those who carried the cargo, blacksmiths, artisans and the rest”<sup>5</sup>. The figure transmitted by Michael the Syrian is absolutely improbable, so it cannot even be questioned.

Of all the sources we have, the chronicle of Zosimus, written in the fifth century, gives us the most truthful information about the army forces employed by Julianus against the Sassanid Empire. The Roman-Byzantine author records that the ground forces participating in the campaign, respectively “the legions of infantry and cavalry troops, had sixty-five thousand people in total”<sup>6</sup>. However, we find that Zosimus does not make any reference to the numbers of sailors of the imperial fleet.

To the imperial forces were added the military contingents of the empire's allies. He relied, in particular, on the collaboration with the armies

---

<sup>2</sup> Philostorgius, *Church History*. Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Ph. R. Amidon, Society of Biblical Literature, Atlanta 2007, 7.4c; see also edition: Filostorgiu, *Istoria bisericească*. Ediție bilingvă. Traducere de D. Garofeanu. Studiu introductiv, tabel cronologic și note explicative de D. Mîrșanu. Ediție îngrijită de A. Muraru, Polirom, Iași, 2012, VII.4c.

<sup>3</sup> E. Müller, *Kaiser Flavius Claudius Julianus. Biographie nebst Auswahl seiner Schriften*, Fr. Rehtmeyer's Verlag, Hannover, 1900, p. 54.

<sup>4</sup> Michel le Syrien, *Chronique de Michel le Syrien Patriarche jacobite d'Antioche*. Éditée pour la première fois et traduite en français par J.-B. Chabot, t. I, Paris, 1899, p. 281 (reedită la Bruxelles, 1963).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>6</sup> Zosimi comitis et exadvocati fisci, *Historiae*, ex recognitione Immanuelis Bekkeri, Bonnae, MDCCCXXXVII, 3.13; see also editions: Zosimus, *New History*. A Translated with Commentary by R.T. Ridley, Australian Association for Byzantine Studies Department of Greek, Canberra, 1982, 3.13.1; Zosimo, *Storia nuova*, introduzione, traduzione e note di F. Conca. Testo greco a fronte, 2007, I.13.1.

of King Arsaces of Armenia (350-364 or 339-369)<sup>7</sup>. The effective force of Armenian troops was estimated, with reservations, by Ilkka Syvanne to about 50,000-70,000 men<sup>8</sup>. The emperor could also count on the support of some Arab tribes. Ammianus Marcellinus reports that, while the emperor was at Callinicum, “*the Saracen rulers (Saracenarum reguli gentium)*” appeared before him, who, in obedience, offered him “*a golden crown*”, and he received them with delight, seeing in them “*some future helpers in the war*”<sup>9</sup>.

Given the absence of other information on this issue also the opinions of modern historians differ. Some of them spoke in favor of the figure of 100,000 people, unfoundedly attributed to Libanius, others accept the one transmitted by Zosimus and claim that for the land component of the campaign against the Sassanids, Emperor Julianus mobilized a number 65,000 soldiers, others, following their own calculations based on information from other sources, claim that the effectives employed in the campaign amounted to 95,000 people or even up to 130,000 soldiers<sup>10</sup>.

As far as we are concerned, we consider that the contradictory information, transmitted by the sources, does not allow us an exact estimate of the numbers of Roman-Byzantine soldiers mobilized by Julianus for the campaign against the Parthians. The calculations made based on this information lead us to different results from each other, which instead of simplifying, further complicates solving the problem. One such example is represented by the acceptance, as being true, of the number of 65,000

---

<sup>7</sup> Julian, *The Works of the Emperor Julian*, vol. III. With an English Translation by W. C. Wright, William Heinemann-G.P. Putnam's Sons, London-New York, 1923, nr. 57; Ammiano Marcellino, *Le storie*. A cura di A. Salem, UTET, Novara, 2013, XXIII.3.2; see also editions: Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire (A.D. 354-378)*. Selected and translated by W. Hamilton, with Introduction and Notes by A. Wallace-Hadrill, Penguin Books, Bungay, 1986, 23.2; Idem, *Istorie romană*. Studiu introductiv, traducere, note și indice D. Popescu, București, 1982, XXIII.2.2.

<sup>8</sup> I. Syvanne, *The Military History of Late Rome AD 361-395*, Pen & Sword Books Limited, Barnsley, 2018, p. 77.

<sup>9</sup> Ammiano Marcellino, *Le storie*, XXIII.3.8; Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire*, 23.3; Idem, *Istorie romană*, XXIII.3.8; Cf. I. Shahîd, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth Century*, Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, Washington, D.C., 2006, p. 114.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. E. Müller, *op. cit.*, p. 54; Cf. A. Piganiol, *L'Empire chrétien, 325-395*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 1972, p. 141; Cf. D. Hunt, *Julian*, in „The Cambridge Ancient History”, vol. XIII. „The Late Empire, A.D. 337-425”. Edited by A. Cameron and P. Garsney, Cambridge University Press, 2008, p. 74; Cf. I. Tantillo, *L'imperatore Giuliano*, ediție digitală eBook, GLF. Editori Laterza, Roma-Bari, 2010, p. 82; Cf. T. Gnoli, *La guerre di Giuliano imperatore*, il Mulino, Bologna, 2015, p. 109.

soldiers transmitted by Zosimus regarding the ground forces, infantry and horsemen, all together. We know, however, from the account of Ammianus Marcellinus, that the total number of people serving on the ships was “almost 20,000 soldiers”<sup>11</sup>. Based on this information, we could admit that the total strength of the imperial forces, engaged in the campaign, land and naval together, would have amounted to about 85,000 soldiers.

Taking into consideration other information, regarding the effectives of imperial forces, at different moments of the campaign, leads us to obtain contradictory results. These, instead of simplifying are only making more difficult to solve the problem.

From the accounts of Ammianus Marcellinus, Magnus Carrhenus, Libanius, and Zosimus, we know that at Carrhae, Julianus detached from the army a corps of troops which he placed under the command of Generals Procopius, *notarius*, and Sebastianus, *comes*, to whom he entrusted the mission to operate along the left bank of the Tigris River. The information contained in the narrative or documentary sources we have, regarding the effectives of the army corps commanded by Procopius and Sebastianus, is contradictory. Ammianus Marcellinus claims that it numbered 30,000 soldiers<sup>12</sup>. Magnus Carrhenus, tribune in the Roman-Byzantine army during the campaign, taken over by the chronicler Ioannes Malalas (sixth century), estimates the army corps to 16,000 soldiers<sup>13</sup>. Another contemporary, the rhetorician Libanius, states that the effectives of that army corps numbered 20,000 soldiers<sup>14</sup>. The historian Zosimus speaks for the number of 18,000 infantry, placed under the command of the two generals<sup>15</sup>.

---

<sup>11</sup> Ammiano Marcellino, *Le storie*, XXIV.7.4; Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire*, 24.7; Idem, *Istorie romană*, XXIV.7.4.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, XXIII.3.5; *Ibidem*, 23.3; *Ibidem*, XXIII.3.5.

<sup>13</sup> Magnus Carrhenus, Eutychias Capadox, *De Juliani bello Persico*, in „Fragmenta historicorum Graecorum”, vol. IV, collegit, disposuit, notis et prolegomenis illustravit Carolus Mullerus, Editore Ambrosio Firmin Didot, Institutii Franciae Typographo, Parisiis, MDCCCLI, p. 4; Ioannis Malalae, *Chronographia*, ex recensione Ludovici Dindorfii, Impensis Ed. Weberi, Bonnae, MDCCCXXXI, p. 329; J. Malalas, *The Chronicle of John Malalas*. A Translated by Elizabeth Jeffreys, M. Jeffreys and R. Scott with B. Croke, Jenny Ferber, S. Franklin, A. James, D. Kelly Ann Moffatt, Ann Nixon, Australian Association for Byzantine Studies, Melbourne, 1986, 13.21; M.H. Dodgeon, S.N.C. Lieu, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

<sup>14</sup> Libanius, *Funeral Oration upon the Emperor Julian*, in vol. „Julian the Emperor. Containing Gregory Nazianzen’s Two Invectives and Libanius’ Monody. With Julian’s Extant Theosophical Works”. Translated by C.W. King, George Bell and Sons, London, 1888, p. 190.

<sup>15</sup> Zosimi comitis et exadvocati fisci, *Historiae*, 3.12; Zosimus, *New History*, 3.12.5; Zosimo, *Storia nuova*, III.12.5.

In his work, Ammianus Marcellinus also relates that, in June 363, in order to cross the Tigris, to engage in battle with the Persian forces, under the walls of the Ctesiphon, Julianus embarked 80 soldiers on each large transport vessels<sup>16</sup>. According to Zosimus, the number of these vessels was 600<sup>17</sup>. It turns out that 48,000 soldiers were loaded on the ships. If we add to them the number of those in the army corps commanded by Procopius and Sebastianus, as well as the 20,000 sailors, we reach the following numbers: 98,000 men (78,000 ground forces and 20,000 sailors), according to the figures of Ammianus Marcellinus; 88,000 soldiers (68,000 ground forces and 20,000 sailors), according to Libanius; 86,000 fighters (66,000 ground forces and 20,000 sailors), according to those of Zosimus; 84,000 soldiers (64,000 ground forces and 20,000 sailors), according to Magnus Carrhenus. We find that, in the last three cases, the ground forces are very close to those recorded by Zosimus, which leads us to admit that the figure of 65,000 soldiers, infantry and horsemen together, could have a high degree of veracity.

As we have already shown, along with the ground forces, Julianus equipped an impressive fleet for the war against the Sassanid Empire. The action of building and equipping the fleet, which was to operate, initially on the Euphrates, and later on the Tigris, must have been extremely difficult. We do not base this statement on the fact that the empire did not have a permanent river fleet in the area, as it had, for example, on the Rhine (*Classis Germanica*) or on the Danube (*Classis Moesica*). The fleet closest to the future theater of operations was at that time *Classis Syriaca*, which had its command at Seleucia Priariae (Samandağ, Turkey), a port located in the vicinity of Antioch.

At the beginning of its operation, among the missions of *Classis Syriaca* was also included that of providing logistical support to any military expedition against the Parthians, including by transferring ships on the Euphrates. We do not know if this mission was still in force in the second half of the fourth century. Consequently, we do not know whether or not *Classis Syriaca* contributed or not with vessels, from its structure, to the expedition of 363.

An imperial edict, issued by the emperors Valentinian I and Valens in 369 or 370, a few years after Julian's expedition, mentions a *Classis*

---

<sup>16</sup>Ammiano Marcellino, *Le storie*, XXIV.6.4; Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire*, 24.6; *Idem, Istorie romană*, XXIV.6.4.

<sup>17</sup>Zosimi comitis et exadvocati fisci, *Historiae*, 3.13; Zosimus, *New History*, 3.13.2; Zosimo, *Storia nuova*, III.12.2.

*Seleucena*<sup>18</sup>. The absence of other information about its existence and operation does not allow us to know whether this was a newly established fleet or not. As far as we are concerned, we believe that the *Classis Seleucena* is not a newly established fleet. Most likely, it is one and the same with *Classis Syriaca*. The name by which it is mentioned in the imperial edict certainly comes from the city of residence of its command.

Returning to the Roman-Byzantine fleet in 363, we believe that the operations of its establishment began in mid-July 362. We believe that they can be directly related to the establishment by Julianus of the residence and command, in the vicinity, at Antioch, precisely to coordinate the mobilization of military forces for the campaign against the Parthians. They probably lasted until the beginning of March 363, on the eve of the start of the military operations.

The sources we have provide us with a series of information on the numbers of the Roman-Byzantine fleet engaged in the campaign. Magnus Carrhenus, taken over by the chronicler Ioannes Malalas, suggests that, in the perspective of launching the campaign against the Sassanids, most of the Roman-Byzantine fleet was concentrated at Samosata (Samsat), on the Euphrates<sup>19</sup>. He tells us that most of the *vessels* (*πλοῖα*) equipped, in order to participate in the expedition, were built in this city-port on the Euphrates and that they were “*some made of wood and others of leather*”<sup>20</sup>. Their number, the author claims, was 1,250<sup>21</sup>.

According to Ammianus Marcellinus, the Roman-Byzantine fleet consisted of “*a thousand transport vessels (onerariae naves) of various types, loaded in abundance with food, attack weapons and siege engines*” to which were added “*fifty warships (bellatrices naves) and as many ships with pontoons needed to build bridges*”<sup>22</sup>. The number of ships in the Roman-Byzantine fleet amounted, according to the information transmitted by Ammianus Marcellinus, to 1,100 ships. Impressed by the size of the fleet, Ammianus Marcellinus would compare it to the “*fleet of the mighty king Xerxes*”, with which the Achaemenid sovereign invaded Greece in 480

---

<sup>18</sup>*Imperatoris Theodosii Codex*, 10.23.1, <http://ancientrome.ru/ius/library/codex/liber16.htm> (accesat: 18.04.2015).

<sup>19</sup> Magnus Carrhenus, *op. cit.*, p. 4; Ioannis Malalae, *Chronographia*, p. 329; J. Malalas, *The Chronicle*, 13.21; M.H. Dodgeon, S.N.C. Lieu, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibidem; Ibidem; Ibidem; Ibidem.*

<sup>21</sup>*Ibidem*, p. 5; *Ibidem; Ibidem; Ibidem.*

<sup>22</sup>Ammiano Marcellino, *Le storie*, XXIII.3.9; Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire*, 23.3; Idem, *Istorie romană*, XXIII.3.9.

BC, enthusiastically stating that “*the waters of the Euphrates could no longer be seen beneath it*”<sup>23</sup>.

Zosimus gives us interesting information about the type and number of ships in the Roman-Byzantine fleet. According to his record, the fleet consisted of “*six hundred vessels (πλοῖα) made of wood and five hundred of leather*”, as well as “*fifty warships*” and “*as many pontoons*” needed to build floating bridges for ground forces to cross the rivers<sup>24</sup>. From the information transmitted by Zosimus it appears that the structure of the imperial fleet included 1,200 ships. Many vessels, the author relates, “*brought food for the army, wood needed for siege equipment and ready-built siege engines*”<sup>25</sup>.

Finally, also regarding the number and types of vessels in the structure of the Roman-Byzantine fleet, we also retain the opinion of the chronicler Ioannes Zonaras (11th-12th century). He, taking on older sources, claims that the imperial fleet consisted of “*700 triremes (τριήρεις) and 400 light vessels*”, meaning 1,100 ships in total<sup>26</sup>.

Some brief information about the imperial fleet is also found in a letter from Emperor Julianus himself, written on March 10, 363 at Hierapolis and addressed to one of his close friends, the sophist Libanius, who at that time was acting as quaestor, such as and in *Oratio XVIII*, of the last. Without giving any details on the number and type of vessels in the fleet, the emperor simply reported that “*the ships (ναῦς) that will be used on the river are loaded with grain, or rather with baked bread and sour wine*”<sup>27</sup>. For his part, Libanius stated in his speech that, in the run-up to the campaign, Salutius, praefectus praetorio Orientis, had been ordered “*to cover the Euphrates with vessels and load them with supplies*”<sup>28</sup>. Festus also expressed the same opinion, stating that the emperor “*brought on Euphrates a fleet destined for supply*”<sup>29</sup>.

---

<sup>23</sup> *Ibidem; Ibidem; Ibidem.*

<sup>24</sup> Zosimi comitis et exadvocati fiscali, *Historiae*, 3.13; Zosimus, *New History*, 3.13.2; Zosimo, *Storia nuova*, III.13.2.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem; Ibidem. Ibidem.*

<sup>26</sup> Ioannis Zonarae, *Epitomae historiarum libri XIII-XVIII*, edidit Theodorus Buttner-Wobst, Impensis Ed. Weberi, Bonnae, MDCCCXCVII, XIII, 13.9; J. Zonaras, *The History of Zonaras. From Alexander Severus to the death of Theodosius the Great*. Translated by Th. M. Banchich and E.N. Lane. Introduction and commentary by Th. M. Banchich, Routledge. Taylor & Francis Group, London and New York, 2009, XIII.13.

<sup>27</sup> Julian, *op. cit.*, nr. 58.

<sup>28</sup> Libanius, *op. cit.*, p. 189.

<sup>29</sup> Festus, *Breviarium Gestarum Populi Romani*, editio bilinguis *Scurtă istorie a poporului roman*. Traducere de M. și Roxana Curcă. Ediție îngrijită, studiu introductiv, note și

The comparison of the numbers advanced by the mentioned authors leads to the finding of differences of 100 vessels, between the figure affirmed by Ammianus Marcellinus and Zosimus, respectively of 150 vessels, between that of the first and that of Magnus Carrhenus. An explanation is difficult to formulate. As a hypothesis, we could admit that the differences consist in the number of pontoons, which are recorded by Zosimus and Magnus Carrhenus, unlike Ammianus Marcellinus which records the number of transport vessels. In such a case, it means that two pontoons were loaded on each of the 50 ships, if their total number was 100, respectively three pontoons, if their total number was 150. Regarding the types of vessels, the inconsistency of the information makes it impossible to know them either. Based on the news, Henric Sudhaus identified three types of ships: for transport, combat and bridges<sup>30</sup>. A close opinion is expressed by Tommaso Gnoli, according to whom the ships of the imperial fleet were for the transport of goods, for war and for genius<sup>31</sup>. Such identification is, however, an extremely general one. According to Michael Pitassi “*from the end of the third century onwards, the types of warships began to change*”, a situation that led to “*the disappearance of some of the older types*”<sup>32</sup>. At the beginning of the 4th century, the same author claims, we are witnessing the introduction of “*new types of ships*” in the service of the imperial fleets<sup>33</sup>.

We also know from certain studies that in the imperial fleets were in service particularly varied types of warships or transport ships. At river borders, such as those of the Rhine and the Danube, types of vessels and boats specialized in river operations have developed<sup>34</sup>. For example, in the period analyzed by us, the river fleets of the empire used open vessels, monoramas and low draft, which were of two types: war and transport<sup>35</sup>.

We know from the information transmitted by Ammianus Marcellinus and Zosimus that only 50 ships in the fleet were warships. Neither of the two authors specifies what classes and types of ships they belonged to. The lack of information did not allow modern researchers to

---

comentarii, indice de N. Zugravu, Editura Universității „Alexandru Ioan Cuza”, Iași, 2003, 28.1.

<sup>30</sup> H. Sudhaus, *De ratione quae intercedat inter Zosimi et Ammiani de bello a Iuliano imperatore cum Persis gesto relations. Dissertatio Historica*, Formis Caroli Georgi, Bonnae, MDCCCLXX, p. 15.

<sup>31</sup> T. Gnoli, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

<sup>32</sup> M. Pitassi, *The Roman Navy. Ships, Man and Warfare 350 BC – Ad 475*, ediție digitală eBook, Seaforth Publishing, Barnsley, 2012, p. 60-61.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 61.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 59.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 61

decide categorically on the type of battleships from the structure of the Roman-Byzantine fleet participating in the campaign of 363. For example, Joseph Bidez considers them to be galleys<sup>36</sup>. Ilkka Syvanne claims that the warships may have been similar to those from the years '30-'50 of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, perhaps even slightly larger, with crews of about 200 people each<sup>37</sup>.

As far as we are concerned, we will try to provide possible and relevant answers to these problems. They are based, in particular, on the information held, regarding the vessels of two other important river fleets of the empire, the one of the Rhine and the one of the Danube.

A series of news that we have highlights the fact that, from the end of the 3rd century, in the river fleets on the Rhine and on the Danube, a ship known as *lusoria* was in service as a warship<sup>38</sup>. *Navis lusoria* remained in service on the Rhine until the collapse of the river border, and on the Danube until the middle of the sixth century. The ship had 20 oars on each side and a light sailing platform, it was long and slender, which ensured it reached a higher speed<sup>39</sup>. According to some estimates, its length was 21 m and its width was 2.7 m<sup>40</sup>. We also deduce from this information that the number of oarsmen of such a vessel was 40 people. There were also smaller *navis lusoria*, with 15 oars on each side of the board, which leads to the conclusion that the number of oars on them was 30 people<sup>41</sup>. In either case, the oarsmen were joined by the captain of the ship, his second, and probably one or two officers.

Regarding the number of fighters embarked on the *navis lusoria*, Ammianus Marcellinus informs us that during the campaigns on the Rhine, during the period when he was *Caesar* of Gaul, Julianus ordered, during an attack on the Alamanni, the embarkation of a number of 300 of lightly armed fighters on “*forty lusoria (lusoriae naves quadraginta)*”<sup>42</sup>. We deduce from this information that the number of soldiers embarked on a ship amounted to about eight men. We also consider it difficult to believe that Julianus, who had had the opportunity to discover and prove the

---

<sup>36</sup>J. Bidez, *Vita de Giuliani Imperatore*, Il Chierchio Iniziative Editoriali, Rimini, 2004, p. 286.

<sup>37</sup>I. Syvanne, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

<sup>38</sup>C.G. Starr, *The Roman Imperial Navy 31 B.C. – A.D. 324*, Cornell University Press at Ithaca, New York, 1941, p. 151-152.

<sup>39</sup>M. Pitassi, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

<sup>40</sup>R. D'Amato, *Imperial Roman Warships 193-565 AD*, Osprey Publishing, Oxford, 2017, p. 26.

<sup>41</sup>*Ibidem*, p. 30.

<sup>42</sup>Ammiano Marcellino, *Le storie*, XVIII.2.11-12; Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire*, 18.2; Idem, *Istorie romană*, XXIII.2.11-12.

qualities of *naves lusoriae* during the military operations on the Rhine, will not be using them in the campaign against the Sassanid Empire.

The rest of the ships in the fleet equipped by Julianus were transport ships of different sizes, built of wood and leather, referred to by Magnus Carrahenus, taken over by Ioannes Malalas, and Zosimus. It is interesting that Ammianus Marcellinus, also a contemporary of the events and a participant in the campaign, as an officer of the imperial army, does not make any special reference, as do the other two authors, to the presence of this type of vessel in the imperial fleet. It is not excluded, however, that they are placed by the author among the “*transport ships of different constructions*”, which he mentions as predominant in the structure of the fleet<sup>43</sup>.

By identifying the transport vessels, Louis Dillemann concluded that, at the time of Julianus' expedition against the Parthians, two types of vessels were used on the Euphrates. The first type, which also sailed the Tigris, was called *kellek*, and the second type was called *šahtūr* (*chakhtour*)<sup>44</sup>.

The *kellek*-type vessels were built of a system of crossed wooden beams, fixed on inflatable leather bellows, which increased their buoyancy. It was equipped with heavy oars, which were used in deep and fast waters only to steer the boat, but when the river current was weak, they were also used to propel the boat, and to increase the speed, the number of oarsmen was increased<sup>45</sup>. Some experts believe that *kellek*-type vessels were used “*only on the Tigris and its tributaries*”, while, due to “*more difficult navigation on the Euphrates, they were never used there*”<sup>46</sup>.

The *šahtūr*-type vessel (*chakhtour*), claimed Louis Dillemann, was considered superior to the *kellek*-type vessel. Unlike the *kellek*, the *šahtūr* (*chakhtour*) was made entirely of wooden planks, nailed to an oblique position, and had a bitumen-overlaid board. Like the *kellek*, it was used to descend the river, and could be towed uphill. As it has been practically

---

<sup>43</sup>Ammiano Marcellino, *Le storie*, XXIII.3.9; Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire*, 23.3; Idem, *Istorie romană*, XXIII.3.9.

<sup>44</sup>L. Dillemann, *Ammien Marcellin et les Pays de l'Euphrate et du Tigre*, in „Syria”, 38, 1961, 1-2, p. 152.

<sup>45</sup>*Ibidem*.

<sup>46</sup>E. Dabrowa, *Naval Operations During Persian Expedition of Emperor Julian (363 AD)*, in vol. „The late Roman Army in the Near East from Diocletian to the Arab Conquest. Proceedings of a colloquium held Potenza, Acerenza and Matera, Italy (May 2005)”. Edited by A.S Lewin, Pietrina Pellegrini with the aid of Z.T. Fiema and S. Janniard, 2007, p. 238, n. 22.

demonstrated, this type of boat is made very quickly and easily. In this way, 7-8 boats could be built in two days<sup>47</sup>.

In general, both *šahtūr* (*chakhtour*) and *kellek* vessels were dismantled on arrival at their destination. The materials used in their construction, especially the wood, were sold<sup>48</sup>.

In a relatively recent paper, the Polish historian Edward Dabrowa concluded that the information provided by Ammianus Marcellinus would lead to the conclusion that wooden ships were made of planks joined together, being flat-bottomed rather than hulled vessels, which included them in the category of *šahtūr* type<sup>49</sup>. Contrary to popular belief, Edward Dabrowa believes that leather vessels were not in the *kellek* category, but rather “a variant of the *šahtūr* type, probably intended for food transportation”<sup>50</sup>. The use of leather in their construction had, in particular, the role of protecting the load from moisture. Although very simple in terms of construction and used only for descent on the river, the *šahtūr*-type vessels were, however, “strong enough to ensure the safety of crews and cargo”<sup>51</sup>. Depending on their size, *šahtūr* vessels could carry loads between 10 and 20 tons<sup>52</sup>. Without rejecting the real possibility, moreover, that most of the transport vessels in the Roman-Byzantine fleet were boats of local origin, *kellek* and *šahtūr* (*chakhtour*), we believe, however, that it is almost impossible to admit that, in their entirety, this category of ships would have been reduced, exclusively, to the two types, in reality some rafts, even if some of them were of greater capacity. This theory becomes all the more difficult to accept as, at that time, the imperial fleets, both naval and river, had different types of ships. A series of summary information, transmitted by the available sources, allows us to admit, at least hypothetically, the possibility that the types of transport vessels used in the 363 campaign were, in turn, more varied. For example, at one point, Zosimus records in his history that during the march to Ctesiphon, along the Euphrates, the emperor “embarked horsemen on ships (*πλοίοις*) and infantry on other vessels (*ναυσίῳ*)”<sup>53</sup>. We find from reading the text of the Roman-Byzantine author that he makes a clear distinction between the ships on which the

---

<sup>47</sup>L. Dillemann, *op. cit.*, p. 152.

<sup>48</sup>*Ibidem*; J. Matthews, *The Roman Empire of Ammianus*, Duckworth, London, 1989, p. 147; E. Dabrowa, *op. cit.*, p. 238; I. Syvanne, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

<sup>49</sup>E. Dabrowa, *op. cit.*, p. 238; I. Syvanne, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibidem*.

<sup>51</sup>*Ibidem*.

<sup>52</sup>*Ibidem*; I. Syvanne, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

<sup>53</sup>Zosimi comitis et exadvocati fisci, *Historiae*, 3.17; Cf. Zosimus, *New History*, 3.17.2-3; Zosimo, *Storia nuova*, III.17.2-3.

cavalry troops were embarked and those intended for the infantry troops. The finding leads us to believe that among the transport vessels in the structure of the imperial fleet could be some specialized in horse transport. As a hypothesis, we consider that they could be of the *hippagus* type, a vessel used since antiquity. We know that in the 4th century this type of ship had a crew of 60 oarsmen and could carry 30 horses<sup>54</sup>. We also know that at that time, *camara* and *oraria* vessels were used for transporting the troops<sup>55</sup>.

Most likely, small vessels must also be identified among the transport vessels. We have in mind here those “*rafts and boats (lintribus et cymbis)*”, mentioned, at one point, by Ammianus Marcellinus in his work<sup>56</sup>.

We also know that a shorter ship was used for river transport, called *caudicaria*, respectively *iudicaria*, on the Danube<sup>57</sup>. *Navis iudicaria* was 17 m long and 3.5 m wide<sup>58</sup>. Also on the Danube, especially in the river delta, a type of vessel called *platypegia (platypegion)* was used from the end of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, which had a low draft, flat bottom, a high bow and stern, as well as a cabin on the stern and also a simple navigation system<sup>59</sup>. The boat was probably like a barge<sup>60</sup>. For transport on the same river, at the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century, *navis agrariensis* had also entered service<sup>61</sup>.

We do not categorically claim that transport vessels of the type *caudicaria* or *iudicaria*, *platypegia*, *agrariensis*, *hippagus*, *camara* or *oraria* were also in the service of the imperial fleet, equipped by Julianus for the campaign against the Parthians. We consider, however, as a working hypothesis, that, given the conditions of river navigation on the Euphrates and Tigris, somewhat similar to those on the Rhine and Danube, such a possibility cannot be ruled out. Moreover, our thesis, namely that the types of transport vessels were not reduced to *kellek* and *šahtūr (chakhtour)* seems to be supported, indirectly, by the information transmitted by Ammianus Marcellinus and Libanius on the occasion of the burning of Julianus' fleet. In their accounts, the two authors present the reasons for the emperor's

---

<sup>54</sup> L. Casson, *Ships and Seamanship in the Ancient World*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 1971, p. 93; R. Drews, *Militarism and the Indo-Europeanizing of Europe*, Routledge. Taylor & Francis Group, London and New York, 2017, p. 204; R. D'Amato, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

<sup>55</sup> R. D'Amato, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

<sup>56</sup> Ammiano Marcellino, *Le storie*, XXIV.4.9; Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire*, 24.4; Idem, *Istorie romană*, XXIV.4.9.

<sup>57</sup> M. Pitassi, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

<sup>58</sup> R. D'Amato, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

<sup>59</sup> M. Pitassi, *op. cit.*, p. 61.

<sup>60</sup> L. Casson, *op. cit.*, p. 334.

<sup>61</sup> R. D'Amato, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

decision, among them not being found the impossibility of the vessels used until then to sail against the current, on the Tigris and Euphrates, as was the case with the types: *kellek* and *šahtūr (chakhtour)*<sup>62</sup>. In fact, it was precisely against the current of the Tigris River that the imperial fleet sailed from the moment of crossing the Euphrates on this river until the time of its burning.

Regarding the number of sailors on the ships, only Ammianus Marcellinus gives us a total figure of them. According to the news transmitted by the author, the Roman-Byzantine fleet was served by “almost 20,000 soldiers”<sup>63</sup>. We deduce from this information that the sailors in the fleet were soldiers at the same time.

Their distribution on vessels remains unknown to us. Ilkka Syvanne hints that 10,000 soldiers were embarked on the warships, to which he assigns 200 men for each crew<sup>64</sup>. This would mean that the other 10,000 soldiers were embarked on the transport ships, which would lead to an average of about 9-10 people per crew, if the number of ships was that recorded by Ammianus Marcellinus, 8-9 people, according to the number of vessels transmitted by Zosimus, and, respectively about 8 people, compared to the number of vessels recorded by Magnus Carrhenus.

Undoubtedly, such a conclusion, although exciting, cannot be supported by the information available. Certainly the numbers of crews on each type of vessel were different. The number of people in the crews was higher on warships and large transport ships and very low, probably a few people, on small boats. The command of the fleet was entrusted to the tribune Constantianus and the committee Lucillianus<sup>65</sup>. The quality of admirals, respectively “*navarhi (ναύαρχοι)*”, of the two commanders is confirmed by Zosimus, who calls them Constantius and Lucianus<sup>66</sup>.

The information of the Roman-Byzantine authors, regarding the structure of the imperial fleet, reveals the secondary role reserved for it in the campaign against the Sassanid state. The extremely large number of transport vessels, to the detriment of warships, clearly shows that the main mission entrusted to the fleet was to ensure the transport of food and

---

<sup>62</sup> Ammiano Marcellino, *Le storie*, XXIV.7.4-6; Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire*, 24.7; Idem, *Istorie romană*, XXIV.7.4-6; Libanius, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibidem*, XXIV.7.4; *Ibidem*; *Ibidem*, XXIV.7.4.

<sup>64</sup> I. Syvanne, *op. cit.*, p. 83.

<sup>65</sup> Ammiano Marcellino, *Le storie*, XXIII.3.9; Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire*, 23.3; Idem, *Istorie romană*, XXIII.3.9; Cf. D. Woods, *The Role of the Comes Lucillianus during Julian's Persian Expedition*, in „L'Antiquité Classique”, 67, 1998, p. 243-248.

<sup>66</sup> Zosimi comitis et exadvocati fisci, *Historiae*, 3.13; Zosimus, *New History*, 3.13.3; Zosimo, *Storia nuova*, III.13.3.

logistics needed by the ground forces, and only secondarily its engagement in some actual military operations.

**The campaign: the role of the fleet.** The campaign against the Sassanid Empire began “*on the third day before the ninth of March*”, respectively on March 5, 363, still “*before the end of winter*” or “*shortly before spring*” when Julianus, at the head of his troops, left Antioch of Syria, heading east<sup>67</sup>.

As the ground component of the campaign has been repeatedly in the attention of specialists, we will not insist on it. Our approach will be focused, above all, on its water component, respectively on the military actions and operations carried out by the imperial fleet.

The first stages of the itinerary followed by the Roman-Byzantine forces are presented, first of all, in the emperor's letter to the sophist Libanius. To this is added the information contained in the works of Ammianus Marcellinus and Zosimus.

From the account, made by Julianus himself, in the letter to Libanius of March 10, 363, we find that from Antioch he went to Litarbae (El-Térib), where he arrived in the afternoon of the same day (March 5)<sup>68</sup>. The next day, he arrived in Berroea (Aleppo)<sup>69</sup>.

In his letter to Libanius, Julianus informed his collaborator that he had traveled from Berroea to Batnae (Βάτναι), where the troops were stationed<sup>70</sup>. The conclusion that emerges from the news transmitted by Julianus is that the fortress of Batnae was located west of the Euphrates, respectively on the right bank of the river, between Berroea and Hierapolis (Membij, on the Euphrates)<sup>71</sup>.

The information transmitted by the emperor comes in total contradiction with those in the works of Ammianus Marcellinus and

---

<sup>67</sup> Ammiano Marcellino, *Le storie*, XXIII.2.6; Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire*, 23.2; Idem, *Istorie romană*, XXIII.2.6; Libanius, *op. cit.*, p. 189; Socrates, *The Ecclesiastical History of Socrates, surnamed Scholasticus, or the Advocate. Comprising a History of the Church, in Seven Books, from the Accession of Constantine, A.D. 305, to the 38th Year of Theodosius II., including a Period of 140 Years*, Henry G. Bohn, London, MDCCCLIII, III.21; Cf. Julian, *op. cit.*, nr. 58; Cf. Zosimi comitis et exadvocati fisci, *Historiae*, 3.12; Cf. Zosimus, *New History*, 3.12.1; Cf. Zosimo, *Storia nuova*, III.12.1; Cf. R.T. Ridley, *Notes on Julian's Persian Expedition (363)*, in „Historia. Zeitschrift für Alte Geschichte”, XXII, 1973, 2, 2 Quartal, p. 318.

<sup>68</sup> Julian, *op. cit.*, nr. 58; Cf. Fr. Cumont, *La marche de l'empereur Julien d'Antioche à l'Euphrate*, in Idem, „Études Syriennes”, Paris, 1917, p. 6.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibidem*; Cf. *Ibidem*, p. 11.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibidem*; Cf. *Ibidem*, 19.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Fr. Cumont, *op. cit.*, p. 16-23.

Zosimus. Both authors locate the fortress, which they call Batnas (Βάτνας), on the left bank of the Euphrates, east-northeast of Hierapolis<sup>72</sup>.

The contradiction, identified between the information provided by the three authors, is difficult to explain. From our point of view, the one who should be given full credibility is Julianus, who presented the succession of the march stages, from this phase of the campaign, even during their development. As for Ammianus Marcellinus and Zosimus, the former writes his work about three decades after the events presented, a situation in which it is very possible that the accuracy of the facts preserved in the author's memory has faded or distorted over time, and that the second is written only in the fifth century, certainly inspired by the work of its predecessor<sup>73</sup>.

We consider that the most truthful explanation was offered by Henric Sudhaus, who identifies two localities with very close names. One is Batnae (Βάτναι), located to the right of the Euphrates, between Berroea and Hierapolis, to which Julianus refers in his letter to Libanius, and the other is Batnas / Batnis (Batnas-Βάτνας), to the left of the Euphrates, between Hierapolis and Carrhae mentioned by Ammianus Marcellinus and Zonaras in their works<sup>74</sup>. It remains, however, almost inexplicable that the vast majority of modern authors, who studied the campaign against the Sassanid state in 363, completely disregarded the information transmitted by Julianus himself, the most authoritative and truthful source, from our point of view.

In a new stage of the march, the emperor, at the head of the ground forces, went to Hierapolis, where he arrived on March 10, a fact confirmed by other sources<sup>75</sup>. The Roman-Byzantine troops stationed here for three days<sup>76</sup>.

From the information contained in Julian's letter to Libanius, it appears that, at Hierapolis, the junction of the ground forces was made with

---

<sup>72</sup> Ammiano Marcellino, *Le storie*, XXIII.2.6; Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire*, 23.2; Idem, *Istorie romană*, XXIII.2.6; Zosimi comitis et exadvocati fisci, *Historiae*, 3,12; Zosimus, *New History*, 3.12.2; Zosimo, *Storia nuova*, III.12.2.

<sup>73</sup> D.C. Scavone, *Zosimus, Greek Historian of the Fall of the Roman Empire: An Appraisal of His Validity and Merits*, Chicago, 1969, p. 52-62.

<sup>74</sup> H. Sudhaus, *op. cit.*, p. 7, n. 4; Cf. M. Gawlikowski, *La route de l'Euphrate d'Isidore à Julien*, in „Géographie historique au Proche-Orient (Syrie, Phénicie, Arabie, grecques, romaines, byzantines). Actes de la Table Ronde de Valbonne, 16-18 septembre 1985”, édité par P.-L. Gatier, B. Helly, J.-P. Rey-Coquais, Paris 1988, p: 88.

<sup>75</sup> Julian, *op. cit.*, nr. 58; Ammiano Marcellino, *Le storie*, XXIII.2.6; Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire*, 23.2; Idem, *Istorie romană*, XXIII.2.6.

<sup>76</sup> Zosimi comitis et exadvocati fisci, *Historiae*, 3.12; Zosimus, *New History*, 3.12.2; Zosimo, *Storia nuova*, III.12.2.

the fleet, or at least with most of it. This is the only way to explain, in our opinion, the records in the emperor's letter, which stated that “*I gathered all my strength together*” and that “*the vessels that will be used on the river are loaded with grain, or rather with baked bread and sour wine*”<sup>77</sup>.

The thesis of the junction of the land forces with the naval ones, at Hierapolis, is also supported by Zosimus, who relates that the emperor stayed in the city for several days. He recorded in his chronicle that on the “*fifth day*” of the emperor's arrival in the city, that is, on March 14, “*all the ships, both warships and transport vessels, from Samosata and from the other places on the Euphrates where they had been assembled*”, were ordered to take action<sup>78</sup>.

On March 13, 369, leading his troops, reinforced with contingents of “*Scythians*” and Visigoths from the Lower Danube, the emperor left the city of Hierapolis<sup>79</sup>. Roman-Byzantine forces crossed the Euphrates on a bridge of ships and advanced to Batnas or Batnis (March 14). From here, they continued their advance to Carrhae (Harran), in the province of Osroena (March 17)<sup>80</sup>.

The fortress of Carrhae, where the imperial troops would be stationed for a few days, was a strategic point of special importance. Here bifurcated two *royal routes* of the Parthians: one went to Nisibe, Adiabena, then followed the valley of the Tigris, the other went to Circesium / Circesium / Circesion, from where it followed the course of the Euphrates<sup>81</sup>.

According to Ammianus Marcellinus, while stationed at Carrhae, Julianus secretly appointed General Procopius, his relative, as his successor in the event of his death during the campaign<sup>82</sup>. However, the information is in total contradiction with his own statement made on the occasion of the account of the emperor's death, when he claims that, on his deathbed, he would have told those around him, who watched him that “*out of prudence, I do not recommend anything regarding the election of the new emperor, lest I err and not indicate the most worthy. Or if I recommend the one I*

---

<sup>77</sup> Julian, *op. cit.*, nr. 58.

<sup>78</sup> Zosimi comitis et exadvocati fisci, *Historiae*, 3,12; Zosimus, *New History*, 3.12.1; Zosimo, *Storia nuova*, III.12.1.

<sup>79</sup> Ammiano Marcellino, *Le storie*, XXIII.2.7; Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire*, 23.2; Idem, *Istorie romană*, XXIII.2.7; Cf. J. Bidez, *op. cit.*, 2004, p. 285; Cf. T. Gnoli, *op. cit.*, p. 116

<sup>80</sup> *Ibidem*, XXIII.3.1-5; *Ibidem*, 23.3; *Ibidem*, XXIII.3.1-5; Julian, *op. cit.*, nr. 58; Cf. T. Gnoli, *op. cit.*, p. 116.

<sup>81</sup> M. Gawlikowski, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibidem*, XXIII.3.2; *Ibidem*, 23.3; *Ibidem*, XXIII.3.2.

*consider better, being chosen another, not to do him any harm. As an honest son of the country, I wish you to find a good leader after me*<sup>83</sup>.

While still at Carrhae, Julianus detached from the bulk of the army, as we have already shown, the army corps, placed under the command of Generals Procopius and Sebastianus. The two generals had the mission to operate with their forces, reinforced with those of the Armenian king, Arsaces, along the left bank of the Tigris River<sup>84</sup>. The army corps commanded by Procopius and Sebastianus was to undertake both a diversionary action and secure the left flank of the main column, which operated on the eastern bank of the Euphrates<sup>85</sup>. At the same time, they were to carry out a siege movement from the Kurdistan Mountains, passing through the provinces of Corduena and Moxoena, to devastate the land of Chiliocomum, a rich region of the Western Media, and then return to Assyria to support the emperor's forces in the decisive confrontation against the Sassanid population<sup>86</sup>. The junction of the army corps, commanded by Procopius and Sebastianus, with the forces led by Julianus would never take place again<sup>87</sup>. It is estimated by some historians that the implementation of this component of the campaign hoped to attract a significant number of Persian military personnel to defend the Media, which would have greatly facilitated the operations of Roman-Byzantine forces, commanded by Julianus, on the Euphrates<sup>88</sup>.

In the light of this controversial information, even modern historians have not expressed a unified view of the forces under the command of Generals Procopius and Sebastianus. Some of them accepted the figure advanced by Ammianus Marcellinus, others those transmitted by Magnus Carrhenus or Zosimus, or opted for other numbers<sup>89</sup>. For example, in a recent paper, Ilkka Syvanne even estimates that of the 30,000 soldiers under

---

<sup>83</sup> *Ibidem*, XXV.3.20; *Ibidem*, 25.3; *Ibidem*, XXV.3.20.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibidem*, XXIII.3.5; *Ibidem*, 23.3; *Ibidem*, XXIII.3.5, Cf. R.T. Ridley, *op. cit.*, p. 319; Cf. T. Athanasiadis, *Fiul Soarelului. Viața împăratului Iulian Apostatul*, traducere de Elena Lazăr, Editura Meronia, București, 1998, p. 234.

<sup>85</sup> R.T. Ridley, *op. cit.*, p. 318-319.

<sup>86</sup> Ammiano Marcellino, *Le storie*, XXIII.3.5; Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire*, 23.3; Idem, *Istorie romană*, XXIII.3.5; Cf. T. Athanasiadis, *op. cit.*, p. 234.

<sup>87</sup> I.A.O. Kelso, *Ammianus Marcellinus and Procopius of Caesarea: The Eastern Campaigns of Julian and Justinian, 4th and 6th Centuries AD*, Dalhousie University Halifax, Nova Scotia, 1998, p. 26, 33.

<sup>88</sup> J. Matthews, *op. cit.*, p. 138; I.A.O. Kelso, *op. cit.*, p. 25; I. Syvanne, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

<sup>89</sup> Cf. J. Geffcken, *Kaiser Julianus*, Dieterich'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung – Theodor Weicher – in Leipzig, 1914, p. 119; Cf. J. Bidez, *op. cit.*, p. 286; Cf. A. Piganiol, *op. cit.*, p. 141; Cf. D. Hunt, *op. cit.*, p. 74; Cf. T. Gnoli, *op. cit.*, p. 116; Cf. I. Syvanne, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

the command of Procopius and Sebastianus, 18,000-20,000 were infantry and 10,000-12,000 were cavalry<sup>90</sup>.

As for us, admitting as true the highest figure, that transmitted by Ammianus Marcellinus, respectively 30,000 soldiers, placed under the command of Generals Procopius and Sebastianus, we consider that under the direct command of the emperor, who operated in the main direction of the Roman-Byzantine offensive, continued to remain a formidable army corps in terms of combat capability, consisting of 35,000 soldiers in the ground forces and 20,000 in the navy, a total of 55,000 people.

From Carrhae Julianus headed for Davana (Ain Arous), a fortification located at the headwaters of the Belias River (Balikh), where he arrived on March 25, staying here for a day<sup>91</sup>. From Carrhae, the emperor's itinerary would overlap with the royal road of the Parthians, which followed the course of the Euphrates River<sup>92</sup>. On March 27, Julianus was at Callinicum (Raqqa), from where he went the next day to Cercusium or Circesium / Circesion (Buseire), a fortress at the mouth of the Aboras (Khabur) River in the Euphrates, where he arrived in early April<sup>93</sup>.

During this stage of the march, somewhere between Callinicum and Cercusium, both Ammianus Marcellinus and Zosimus claim that the imperial fleet, in its entirety, commanded by the navarchs Constantinaus and Lucillianus, made the junction with the ground forces, which were advancing along the left bank of the Euphrates<sup>94</sup>. The ships were carrying food for the army, assault weapons, materials needed for siege equipment, as well as ready-assembled siege engines.

The next destination of the imperial forces, commanded by Julianus, was the fortress of Zaitha, at Ammianus Marcellinus, Zeutha, at Zosimus. To reach its destination, the Roman-Byzantine army crossed the Aboras River at Cercusium on a bridge of ships<sup>95</sup>.

Now, for the first time, the imperial fleet came into action, bringing the necessary food to the ground forces. We know from the account of Ammianus Marcellinus that, while the operations of crossing the Aboras River were taking place, to the satisfaction of the soldiers, also the “ships

---

<sup>90</sup> I. Syvanne, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

<sup>91</sup> Ammiano Marcellino, *Le storie*, XXIII.3.7; Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire*, 23.3; Idem, *Istorie romană* 1982, XXIII.3.7.

<sup>92</sup> M. Gawlikowski, *op. cit.*, p. 88.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibidem*, XXIII.3.7-8, 5.1; *Ibidem*, 23.3, 5; *Ibidem*, XXIII.3.7-8, 5.1.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibidem*, XXIII.3.9; *Ibidem*, 23.3; *Ibidem*, XXIII.3.9; Zosimi comitis et exadvocati fisci, *Historiae*, 3.13; Zosimus, *New History*, 3.13.1-3; Zosimo, *Storia nuova*, III.13.1-3; Cf. M. Gawlikowski, *op. cit.*, 88.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibidem*, XXIII.5.4; *Ibidem*, 23.5; *Ibidem*, XXIII.5.4.

*loaded with food*” arrived, recently contracted from a supplier, who, because he was a day late their dispatch was sentenced to death and executed by order of General Salutiarius, praefectus praetorio Orientis<sup>96</sup>.

At the end of a new stage of the march, the Roman-Byzantine forces, after passing through Dura Europos, arrived at the fortress of Anatha (Anah). During the march to Anatha, the imperial fleet moved at the same pace as the ground troops. During the voyage, “*the fleet, floating on the river, was afraid to advance too fast, but also to lag behind, because of its bends*”, notes Ammianus Marcellinus<sup>97</sup>.

Located on an island of the Euphrates, the fortress, called Phathousa, by Zosimus, was defended not only by its natural position, but also by a significant garrison and solid fortifications<sup>98</sup>. The mission of conquering the strong fortification went to Count Lucillianus, one of the fleet's commanders. According to Ammianus Marcellinus “*on the evening of the fourth day of the march, at the prince's command, Count Lucilianus embarked a thousand lightly armed soldiers and set out to conquer the fortress of Anatha*”<sup>99</sup>. The information, transmitted by Ammianus Marcellinus, is confirmed by both Magnus Carrhenus and Zosimus, the former stating that under the command of Count Lucillianus were placed “*1,500 brave fighters from a number of spearmen and matinees*”<sup>100</sup>.

Taking advantage of the darkness of the night, the Roman-Byzantine ships surrounded the island, undetected, and the soldiers transported by them occupied positions for the assault. The surprise that the attackers expected did not occur, because in the morning, a local, going down to the river, found the imperial troops and ships and alarmed the defenders<sup>101</sup>. The emperor, who was pursuing military operations on the shore, traveled with two battleships, followed by others carrying siege engines to the island<sup>102</sup>. However, they did not reach a military confrontation, because the emperor

---

<sup>96</sup>*Ibidem*, XXIII.5.6; *Ibidem*; *Ibidem*, XXIII.5.6.

<sup>97</sup>*Ibidem*, XXIV.1.4; *Ibidem*, 24.1; *Ibidem*, XXIV.1.4.

<sup>98</sup>*Ibidem*, XXIV.1.6; *Ibidem*; *Ibidem*, XXIV.1.6; Cf. Zosimi comitis et exadvocati fisci, *Historiae*, 3.14; Cf. Zosimus, *New History*, 3.14.2; Cf. Zosimo, *Storia nuova*, III.14.2.

<sup>99</sup>*Ibidem*; *Ibidem*; *Ibidem*.

<sup>100</sup> Zosimi comitis et exadvocati fisci, *Historiae*, 3.14; Zosimus, *New History*, 3.14.3; Zosimo, *Storia nuova*, III.14.3; Magnus Carrhenus, *op. cit.*, p. 5; Ioannis Malalae, *Chronographia*, p. 330; J. Malalas, *The Chronicle*, 13.21; M.H. Dodgeon, S.N.C. Lieu, *op. cit.*, p. 226.

<sup>101</sup> Ammiano Marcellino, *Le storie*, XXIV.1.6-7; Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire*, 24.1; Idem, *Istorie romană*, XXIV.1.6-7; Cf. Zosimi comitis et exadvocati fisci, *Historiae*, 3.14; Cf. Zosimus, *New History*, 3.14.2-3; Cf. Zosimo, *Storia nuova*, III.13.2-3.

<sup>102</sup>*Ibidem*.1.6; *Ibidem*; *Ibidem*, XXIV.1.6; Cf. *Ibidem*; Cf. *Ibidem*, 3.14.3; f. *Ibidem*, III.14.3.

accepting the conditions of their capitulation, the defenders handed him over the fortress (around April 12)<sup>103</sup>.

While stationed at Anatha, the Roman-Byzantine fleet suffered its first losses. They were not due to confrontations with the enemy, but to the unleashed elements of nature. The day after the capitulation of the fortress, there was a violent storm, which was followed by the overflow of the river. They broke the dams and caused “*the overturning of several ships loaded with supplies*”<sup>104</sup>.

After the subjugation of the city of Anatha, the imperial forces resumed the march. The Imperial Fleet, Ammianus Marcellinus suggests, has returned to its basic mission, to transport the supplies and logistics needed by the army. Following the ground forces, which marched along the river, the Roman-Byzantine vessels passed the island fortresses of Thilutha, Achaiachala (Al Haditha), Baraxamalcha, Diacira, evacuated by the Parthians (April 20), Ozogardana and Macepractathat submitted or had been occupied, advancing to Pirisabora (Al-Ambar), which, according to the author, subjected to a violent siege, surrendered only after fierce resistance (April 29)<sup>105</sup>.

We also know from the news transmitted by Magnus Carrhenus that part of the fleet, under the command of Generals Victor and Dagalaiphus, had the task of securing the backs of the imperial forces operating against the cities of the Euphrates. Emperor Julianus, says Magnus Carrhenus, “*instructed Victor and Dafalaiphus to stay behind with the rest of the vessels and ensure the protection of the main body*”<sup>106</sup>.

Similar information is provided by Gregory of Nazianzus in the Fifth Speech, directed against Julian. In his speech, he states that advancing along the river, “*together with his army and vessels (vavoi), which provided the transport of supplies and luggage*”, the emperor penetrated deep into the territories of the Sassanid Empire<sup>107</sup>.

---

<sup>103</sup>*Ibidem*, XXIV.1.8-9; *Ibidem*; *Ibidem*, XXIV.1.8-9; Cf. *Ibidem*; Cf. *Ibidem*, 3.14.4; Cf. *Ibidem*, III.14.4; Cf. M. Vannesse, *Ammianus Marcellinus on Julian's Persian Expedition (A.D.): a Notea on the Supply Chain*, in vol. „Studies in Latin Literature and Roman History”, t. XVI. Edited by C. Deroux, Brussels, 2012, p. 640.

<sup>104</sup>*Ibidem*, XXIV.1.11; *Ibidem*; *Ibidem*, XXIV.1.11.

<sup>105</sup>*Ibidem*, XXIV.2.1-18; *Ibidem*, 24.2; *Ibidem*, XXIV.2.1-18; Cf. C.P.T. Naudé, *Battles and sieges in Ammianus Marcellinus*, in „Acta Classica”, I, 1958, p. 98, 105; Cf. M. Vannesse, *op. cit.*, p. 641.

<sup>106</sup> Magnus Carrhenus, *op. cit.*, p. 5; Cf. Ioannis Malalae, *Chronographia*, p. 330; Cf. J. Malalas, *The Chronicle*, 13.21; Cf. M.H. Dodgeon, S.N.C. Lieu, *op. cit.*, p. 227.

<sup>107</sup> Grégoire de Nazianze, *Discours 4-5 contre Julien*. Introduction, texte critique, traduction et notes par J. Bernardi, Les Éditions du Cerf, Paris, 1983, 5.9; Grigorie de

Completely different is the version, presented by Zosimus, regarding the role of the fleet during this march. According to his account, the emperor “embarked the horsemen on the ships (πλοίοις) and infantrymen on other vessels (νασίν)”, continuing his journey along the river until “he reached a city called Bersabora (Βηρσαβῶρα)”<sup>108</sup>. Undoubtedly we are not talking here about the whole army, but only about a part of it, quite small in number, in our opinion, which was transported on the river with the help of the fleet.

After the conquest of the fortress of Pirisabora, the Roman-Byzantine forces headed for the fortress of Maiozamalcha, part of the defensive system of the Ctesiphon, well-fortified and defended by a strong garrison and a large swamp<sup>109</sup>. During the siege, which proved to be extremely difficult, the imperial soldiers carried out military operations, including in the swamp. An important role in these military operations went to the small vessels that were part of the imperial fleet, such as rafts and boats. It is said by Ammianus Marcellinus who reports that, during the siege, a significant part of the inhabitants of the fortress sought refuge in Ctesiphon, through the nearby swamp. They were hunted by Roman-Byzantine soldiers, who, embarked “on rafts and boats (intribus et cymbis), roamed the waters” of the swamp taking them prisoners or killing those who resisted<sup>110</sup>.

At the end of a new stage of the march, the imperial forces reached the Naarmalcha Canal, also called the *Canal of the Kings*. According to Ammianus Marcellinus, the canal had been built by Emperor Marcus Ulpus Traianus during his campaign against the Parthians, and rebuilt by Septimius Severus<sup>111</sup>. With a length of “30 stadia” (5,640 km), the canal provided the connection between the Euphrates and the Tigris near the fortress of Coche (Seleucia, on the Tigris)<sup>112</sup>. Using it, writes Ammianus Marcellinus, the Roman-Byzantine fleet “safely traveled the distance of thirty stadia and reached the Tigris”<sup>113</sup>. In order to use the canal, the author

---

Nazianz, *Cuvântarea a IV-a, Cuvântarea a V-a*, in Grigorie de Nazianz, Chiril al Alexandriei, „Cuvântarea a IV-a, Cuvântarea a V-a. Împotriva lui Iulian (I, II)”. Traducere și note de Anamaria-Irina Stoica. Ediție îngrijită de A. Muraru, Polirom, Iași, 2020, V.9.

<sup>108</sup> Zosimi comitis et exadvocati fisci, *Historiae*, 3.17; Zosimus, *New History*, 3.17.2-3; Zosimo, *Storia nuova*, III.17.2-3.

<sup>109</sup> Ammiano Marcellino, *Le storie*, XXIV.4.1-8; Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire*, 24.4; Idem, *Istorie romană*, XXIV.4.1-8.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibidem*, XXIV.4.9; *Ibidem*; *Ibidem*, XXIV.4.9.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibidem*, XXIV.6.1; *Ibidem*, 24.6; *Ibidem*, XXIV.6.1.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibidem*, XXIV.6.2; *Ibidem*; *Ibidem*, XXIV.6.2.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibidem*, XXIV.6.1-2; *Ibidem*; *Ibidem*, XXIV.6.1-2.

relates, it was necessary to unclog it by the Roman-Byzantine military because, in order to make it unusable, the Parthians “covered it with large stone boulders”<sup>114</sup>.

Gregorius Nazianzenus also tells to his own version of the passage of the Roman-Byzantine fleet, from the Euphrates to the Tigris. He claims that the emperor “diverted a not inconsiderable part of the waters of the Euphrates, which would be sufficient to make it navigable for his fleet an old canal” and that using this canal, Julianus “saves his fleet by transferring it safely from a river on another”<sup>115</sup>. In turn, ground forces crossed the Naarmalcha Canal on a bridge of ships<sup>116</sup>.

The passage of the Roman-Byzantine fleet from the Euphrates to the Tigris made near the fortress of Coche or Seleucia, located on the right bank of the river, is also reported by other authors. Here we have in mind Magnus Carrhenus, Zosimus or Sozomenos. However, they do not provide details on the conduct of this naval operation<sup>117</sup>.

Shortly after the passage of the Roman-Byzantine forces on the Tigris, the first large-scale confrontation with the Persian armies, which controlled the left bank of the river, was consumed. The battle took place on the plain on the left bank of the Tigris, in front of the fortress of Ctesiphon. In the beginning phase of the confrontation, the imperial fleet would play a decisive role.

Continuing the military initiative, it was the Roman-Byzantine forces that opened the hostilities. In order to engage in confrontation with Persian troops, however, the Roman-Byzantine army was forced to cross the Tigris. The operations of crossing the river were to be carried out with the help of the fleet.

From *Oranius XVIII* of Libanius it appears that the place of landing was chosen between Coche (Seleucia) and Ctesiphon<sup>118</sup>. The difficulties that

---

<sup>114</sup>*Ibidem*, XXIV.6.2; *Ibidem*; *Ibidem*, XXIV.6.2.

<sup>115</sup> Grégoire de Nazianze, *op. cit.*, 5.10; Grigorie de Nazianz, *op. cit.*, V.10.

<sup>116</sup> Ammiano Marcellino, *Le storie*, XXIV.6.2; Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire*, 24.6; Idem, *Istorie romană*, XXIV.6.2.

<sup>117</sup> Magnus Carrhenus, *op. cit.*, p. 5; Ioannis Malalae, *Chronographia*, p. 330; J. Malalas, *The Chronicle*, 13.21; Zosimi comitis et exadvocati fisci, *Historiae*, 3.24; Zosimus, *New History*, 3.24.2; Zosimo, *Storia nuova*, III.24.2; Sozomen, *A History of the Church in Nine Books, from A.D. 324 to A.D. 440*, Samuel Bagster and Sons, London, MDCCCXLVI, VI.I; Idem, *The Ecclesiastical History, Comprising a History of the Church, from A.D. 324 to A.D. 440*, in vol. „The Ecclesiastical History of Sozomen, Comprising a History of the Church, from A.D. 324 to A.D. 440 also The Ecclesiastical History of Philostorgius, as Epitomised by Photius, Patriarch of Constantinople”. Translated by E. Walford, Henry G. Bohn, London, MDCCCLV, VI.I.

<sup>118</sup> Libanius, *op. cit.*, p. 199.

had to be overcome for the implementation of such a plan are highlighted by Libanius who claims that *“if the soldiers were to cross the river with the help of the fleet, it would have been impossible to approach the cities, while if they wanted to attack the cities, the ships would have been useless, and if they wanted to sail on the Tigris, the effort would be excessive and they would have had to pass, in the middle, between the cities”*<sup>119</sup>.

The unfolding of the hostilities finds its most extensive presentation in the work of Ammianus Marcellinus. Presenting the beginning phase of the battle, he records that *“larger ships, carrying supplies and fighting vehicles, were unloaded and eighty soldiers were embarked on each of them”*<sup>120</sup>.

Similar information is given by Libanius, who even presents a ploy used by the emperor to make the reluctant officers accept his plan and the soldiers to embark on ships. He reports that while the soldiers were allowed to relax with horse racing, the vessels were *“unloaded”* under the pretext of checking the wear and tear of hunting weapons, but in reality the emperor wanted to *“embark the soldiers on them without prior notice”*, while the officers called to a party were convinced that crossing the Tigris was the only solution, because it provided them with a territory unaffected by the war until then<sup>121</sup>. Similar information can be found in Festus' *Breviarium*, which concludes that *“at midnight his soldiers suddenly passed, embarked in ships (navibus), on the other side”*<sup>122</sup>.

The number of vessels participating in these operations shall not be specified in any of the available sources. Based on the information transmitted by Ammianus Marcellinus and taking as a calculation the number of 600 large transport vessels, recorded by Zosimus, we consider, hypothetically, that the number of Roman-Byzantine soldiers embarked on them, engaged in the confrontation with the Parthians, amounted to 48,000 of people. The figure is undoubtedly the total number of fighters under the direct command of Emperor Julian.

Continuing his account, Ammianus Marcellinus notes that the emperor retained with him *“the strongest part of the fleet, which he had divided into three parts”* and he sent another part *“with Count Victor to cross the river in secret at the beginning of the night and occupy the enemy”*

---

<sup>119</sup>*Ibidem*.

<sup>120</sup>Ammiano Marcellino, *Le storie*, XXIV.6.4; Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire*, 24.6; Idem, *Istorie roamnă*, XXIV.6.4.

<sup>121</sup>Libanius, *op. cit.*, p. 200.

<sup>122</sup>Festus, *op. cit.*, 28.2.

shore”<sup>123</sup>. A similar story is found in the Church History of Sozomenos, which states that the troops embarked on the ships “crossed the Tigris River during the night”<sup>124</sup>.

The information transmitted by Ammianus Marcellinus and Sozomenos leads to the conclusion that the mission of the corps commanded by General Victor was to build an extended bridgehead, on the bank controlled by the Parthians, to ensure the landing of the rest of the Roman-Byzantine forces. To ensure the success, the operations carried out by Victor's troops took place at night.

The numbers of the army corps placed under the command of General Victor, as well as the number of ships destined for his transshipment on the left bank of the Tigris, are not specified by Ammianus Marcellinus. Assuming hypothetically that the transport vessels, destined to tranship the imperial forces on the left bank of the river, were divided into three equal parts, it results that 200 ships were assigned to General Victor. If 80 fighters were loaded on each one, it means that the troops of the army corps commanded by Victor amounted to a maximum of 16,000 soldiers. The mission of this army corps was all that more daring as, says Ammianus Marcellinus, the shore controlled by the Parthians was “high and quite difficult to climb”<sup>125</sup>. As for the author's assertion that Julianus stopped the strongest part of the fleet with him, it could have a reason in that, most likely, the 50 warships remained under the emperor's command.

According to Ammianus Marcellinus, members of the Roman-Byzantine command disagreed with the emperor's battle plan. Despite their opposition, Julianus ordered the opening of hostilities. When the signal was given, the author claims, “five ships set off immediately” to the left bank of the Tigris<sup>126</sup>.

Based on the information of Ammianus Marcellinus, we are able to conclude that the detachment of soldiers embarked on the five ships numbered 400 fighters. Certainly, the ships in question were part of those assigned to the corps commanded by General Victor. Undoubtedly, the 400 fighters embarked on them were part of the same corps.

The information of the mentioned author also allows us to conclude that the mission of the respective detachment was to create a bridgehead on

---

<sup>123</sup> Ammiano Marcellino, *Le storie*, XXIV.6.4; Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire*, 24.6; Idem, *Istorie romană*, XXIV.6.4.

<sup>124</sup> Sozomen, *A History of the Church*, VI.I; Idem, *The Ecclesiastical History* VI.I.

<sup>125</sup> Ammiano Marcellino, *Le storie*, XXIV.6.6; Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire*, 24.6; Idem, *Istorie romană*, XXIV.6.6.

<sup>126</sup> *Ibidem*, XXIV.6.5; *Ibidem*; *Ibidem*, XXIV.6.5.

the left bank of the Tigris, under the control of the Parthians. Subsequently, the bridgehead was to be extended by landing the entire corps commanded by General Victor. However, the strong response given by the opponent led to the failure of the attempt of the Roman-Byzantine detachment to land on the shore controlled by the Parthians. When the ships approached the shore, reports Ammianus Marcellinus, “*they were attacked with burning torches and other flammable materials*” exposing themselves to the risk of being “*burned with soldiers altogether*”<sup>127</sup>.

The difficult situation of the Roman-Byzantine army following the failure of the attempt to open the bridgehead by the detachment of General Victor's corps was saved by the emperor's prompt intervention and his ability to make quick decisions. He, changing the previously conceived battle plan, ordered a large-scale attack and the simultaneous landing, on the left bank of the Tigris, of all Roman-Byzantine forces. Then, writes Ammianus Marcellinus “*the emperor intervened, who shouting from the top of his lungs because this was the signal he had given for landing, he encouraged the fleet to hurry. Thus, the ships arrived unharmed ashore*”<sup>128</sup>. Then, followed the assault of the Roman-Byzantine soldiers on the shore controlled by the Parthians, which they occupied after a bloody confrontation. The imperial soldiers, the author continues to record, “*although attacked with stones and arrows, they managed to disembark and take control of the high bank and it was quite difficult to climb*”<sup>129</sup>.

A brief presentation of the landing operations on the left bank of the Tigris can be found in Libanius' *Oratio XVIII*. And he appreciates the success of the Roman-Byzantine soldiers, despite the difficulties raised by the steep bank of the river and the strong opposition of Persian forces<sup>130</sup>.

In opposition to the opinions of the other authors, Sozomenos records an easy victory of the Roman-Byzantine forces. According to his account, the troops that landed on the shore found here “*only a few sleeping Persians*”, who were easily annihilated<sup>131</sup>.

**The end of the Roman-Byzantine fleet.** The successful completion of the landing operations and the occupation of the left bank of the Tigris by the imperial forces marked the end of the first phase of the Roman-Byzantine-Sassanid confrontation under the walls of the Ctesiphon. With

---

<sup>127</sup>*Ibidem; Ibidem; Ibidem.*

<sup>128</sup>Ammiano Marcellino, *Le storie*, XXIV.6.5-6; Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire*, 24.6; Idem, *Istorie romană*, XXIV.6.5-6.

<sup>129</sup>*Ibidem*, XXIV.6.6; *Ibidem; Ibidem*, XXIV.6.6.

<sup>130</sup>Libanius, *op. cit.*, p. 200.

<sup>131</sup>Sozomen, *A History of the Church*, VI.I; Idem, *The Ecclesiastical History* VI.I.

the completion of this stage, the mission of the imperial fleet ended. The second stage, on which we do not insist, was the land battle, particularly violent, ended with the victory of the Roman-Byzantine army.

At this stage of the campaign, Julianus hesitated to attack the Ctesiphon<sup>132</sup>. Although he wished to do so, he eventually preferred to follow the opinion of the majority of his command members, who asked him to relinquish the siege of the Sassanid capital, and decided to continue his advance within the Persian state. With the implementation of this decision, the campaign against the Sassanid Empire entered a new stage, which would bring with it the end of the imperial fleet.

Firmly determined to advance within the Persian state, which meant leaving the Tigris River behind, “*on the left*” the emperor “*ordered the entire fleet to be set on fire*”, says Ammianus Marcellinus<sup>133</sup>. They were exempted from destruction, writes the same author, “*twelve small vessels, necessary for the construction of bridges*”, respectively twelve pontoons “*which were to be transported by carts*”<sup>134</sup>.

Unlike Ammianus Marcellinus, Zosimus claims that Julianus kept a number of 22 pontoons for the situation in which he would have needed to build ship bridges over the rivers. According to him, the entire Roman-Byzantine fleet was set on fire, “*with the exception of eighteen Roman and four Persian ships, which were to be transported and used when needed*”<sup>135</sup>.

Libanius, who in turn confirms the burning of the fleet, says they have been kept “*about fifteen ships needed to build bridges*”<sup>136</sup>. Unlike the other authors, however, he claims that, in the end, they were abandoned as well, because “*it was decided that it was not even convenient to keep the ones that were saved (as in fifteen, necessary to build bridges)*” because the current of the river “*is too violent for the skill of the men*” who have come to paddle, so that, by their incompetence, they risk “*taking the ship, with those on board, into the hands of the enemy*”<sup>137</sup>.

Sozomenos also briefly mentions the burning of the fleet. From his point of view, the burning of the ships would have been imposed on the emperor by the fact that “*too many soldiers were needed to guard them*”<sup>138</sup>.

---

<sup>132</sup>R.T. Ridley, *op. cit.*, p. 325.

<sup>133</sup>Ammiano Marcellino, *Le storie*, XXIV.7.3-4; Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire*, 24.7; Idem, *Istorie romană* 1982, XXIV.7.3-4.

<sup>134</sup>*Ibidem*, XXIV.7.4; *Ibidem*; *Ibidem*, XXIV.7.4.

<sup>135</sup>Zosimi comitis et exadvocati fiscali, *Historiae*, 3.26; Zosimus, *New History*, 3.26.3; Zosimo, *Storia nuova*, III.26.3.

<sup>136</sup>Libanius, *op. cit.*, p. 204.

<sup>137</sup>*Ibidem*.

<sup>138</sup>Sozomen, *A History of the Church*, VI.I; Idem, *The Ecclesiastical History*, VI.I.

Concise information regarding the burning of the fleet is also recorded by other authors. We have here the one from the works of Gregorius Nazianzenus, Ephraem Syrus, Festus, Theodoretus or from the late work of Ioannes Zonaras<sup>139</sup>.

In his work, Ammianus Marcellinus gives us three reasons for Julianus' decision to give up the fleet as he advanced into the Sassanid state. The first was that the ships left alone on the Tigris “*should not remain at the disposal of the enemy*” and that “*almost twenty thousand soldiers should no longer be occupied with the transport and command of those ships, as they had been since the beginning of the expedition*”<sup>140</sup>. The second reason was the awareness that “*in the event of withdrawal, the army will not be able to return to the river through the high and deserted mountains*”<sup>141</sup>. Finally, the third reason was the result of misinformation made by a number of deserters and fugitives, who convinced Julianus of the futility of the fleet in the later stages of the campaign, who under torture “*openly confessed to making false statements*”<sup>142</sup>.

The emperor, further claims Ammianus Marcellinus, learning of the deception of which he was a victim and understanding the gravity of the destruction of the fleet, “*ordered the fire to be extinguished as soon as possible*”, in order to save the ships<sup>143</sup>. However, the measure came too late, because “*all the ships had burned, except for the twelve, which could be saved because they had been pulled further*”, thus, the author concludes “*although it was not necessary, the fleet was destroyed*”<sup>144</sup>.

Libanius also stopped on the factors that led Julianus to order the burning of the fleet. The reasons recorded by him are about the same as those invoked by Ammianus Marcellinus. First of all, Libanius claims, “*according to the initial plan, the fleet was better given to the flames than to*

---

<sup>139</sup>Grégoire de Nazianze, *op. cit.*, 5.12; Grigorie de Nazianz, *op. cit.*, V.12; Ephraem the Syrian, *Hymns against Julian, the King, who aposteised and against the false teachers and against the Jews (Hymni contra Julianum)*. Translated by Judith M. Lieu, with introduction and notes by S.N. C. Lieu, in „The Emperor Julian. Panegyric and Polemic. Claudius Mamertinus, John Chrysostom, Ephraem the Syrian”. Edited by S.N. C. Lieu, Liverpool University Press, Liverpool, 1989, III, 15, III, 15; Festus, *op. cit.*, 28.3; Teodoret al Cirului, *Istoria bisericească*. Traducere de V. Sibiescu, Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, București, 1995, III.25.1; Ioannis Zonarae, *Epitomae historiarum*, XIII, 13.9; J. Zonaras, *The History*, 2009, XIII.13.

<sup>140</sup>Ammiano Marcellino, *Le storie*, XXIV.7.4; Ammianus Marcellinus, *The Later Roman Empire*, 24.7; Idem, *Istorie romană*, XXIV.7.4.

<sup>141</sup>*Ibidem*, XXIV.7.5; *Ibidem*; *Ibidem*, XXIV.7.5.

<sup>142</sup>*Ibidem*; *Ibidem*; *Ibidem*.

<sup>143</sup>*Ibidem*; *Ibidem*; *Ibidem*.

<sup>144</sup>*Ibidem*, XXIV.7.5-6; *Ibidem*; *Ibidem*, XXIV.7.5-6.

remain to the enemy”<sup>145</sup>. Secondly, the plan of the campaign did not foresee that at the end of it the return of the Roman-Byzantine forces to the empire would be done on the same route<sup>146</sup>. Thirdly, because the navigation on the Tigris, against the current, which was “*fast and strong in opposition to the test of the ships*”, made it necessary for rowing “*a large number of hands*”, so that the number of those that would have been needed for these operations would have represented “*more than half the army*”, which made vulnerable the rest of the ground forces that were exposed to enemy blows<sup>147</sup>. Finally, says Libanius, “*the burning of the fleet removed any encouragement to laziness*” so that those “*who wished to do nothing, pretending to be ill to obtain the possibility of transportation on a ship*” would be deprived of this possibility, because “*when there were no ships, every man was under arms*”<sup>148</sup>.

The date of the fleet's fire is difficult to pinpoint. Most likely, it happened a few days before June 16, the date of the first significant land confrontation between the Roman-Byzantine forces and those of the Parthians. The next phases of the campaign against the Parthians, which were eminently terrestrial, are not relevant to our subject. In fact, the expedition was to end at the end of June of the year 363, with the death of Julianus, following a serious wound, received, during a clash with a detachment of Persian troops, at Maranga, on the Tigris (June 26).

**Final considerations.** For the campaign against the Sassanid Empire (March 5-June 26, 363), Emperor Julianus mobilized, in addition to ground troops, a large fleet. Its numbers were estimated at between 1,100 and 1,250 ships by contemporary or late historians. Ammianus Marcellinus, participating in the campaign as an officer of the Roman-Byzantine army, estimates their number at 1,100 vessels, of which 1,000 transport ships of various types, 50 warships and as many for the transport of pontoons needed to build bridges. Another contemporary of the events, Magnus Carrhenus, participating in the campaign as a tribune, states that the fleet numbered 1,250 vessels, most of which were made of wood and others of leather. The Roman-Byzantine historian Zosimus (5th century) records that the imperial fleet numbered 1,200 ships, of which 600 were made of wood, 500 of leather, 50 were warships and as many for the transport of pontoons. Finally, Ioannes Zonaras (11th-12th centuries) considered that the fleet

---

<sup>145</sup>Libanius, *op. cit.*, p, 204.

<sup>146</sup>*Ibidem.*

<sup>147</sup>*Ibidem.*

<sup>148</sup>*Ibidem.*

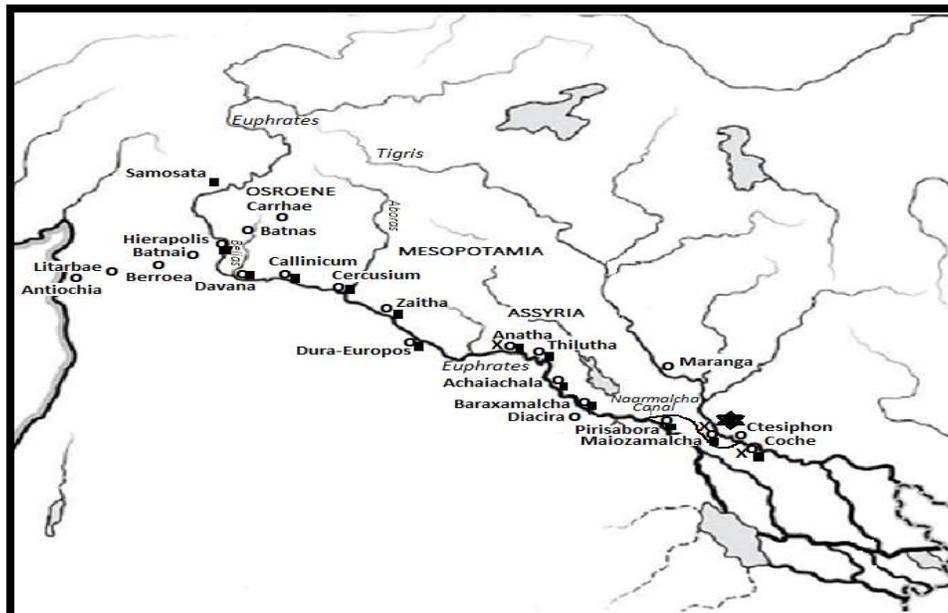
equipped by Julianus, for the campaign against the Parthians, consisted of 1,100 ships, of which 700 were large vessels and 400 light vessels.

The crews who served on the vessels are specified only by Ammianus Marcellinus. He estimates that the number of soldiers involved in transporting and driving the ships has risen to almost 20,000.

The role of the Roman-Byzantine fleet in the campaign against the Parthians was secondary. It almost permanently limited itself to transporting the supplies and logistics needed by the troops. In some cases, cavalry and infantry units of the army were transported with the help of the fleet.

During the campaign, groups of ships from the Roman-Byzantine fleet actively participated in a series of military operations. Such participations are recorded by sources at the siege of the fortresses of Anatha and Maiozamalcha. A major role was played by the large transport vessels of the Roman-Byzantine fleet in the success of the landing of the imperial ground forces near the Ctesiphon, on the left bank of the Tigris, controlled by Sassanid troops, to engage in confrontation with them.

The landing of ground troops on the left bank of the Tigris, near the citadel of Ctesiphon, was the last operation undertaken by the Roman-Byzantine fleet in the campaign against the Parthians. Determined to advance within the Sassanid state, which drove him away from the river, Emperor Julianus ordered the burning of the imperial fleet.



THE ROMAN-BYZANTINE CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE SASSANID  
EMPIRE(MARCH 5 - JUNE 26, 363)

- The Itinerary of the Roman-Byzantine Fleet, from Samosata to Ctesiphon
- The Itinerary of the Roman-Byzantine Ground Forces, from Antioch to Maranga
- X Operations of the Roman-Byzantine Fleet
- ★ The Burning of the Roman-Byzantine Fleet