

# Ancient conflict is 'warning' for 'War in Iraq'

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The consequences of the unlikely defeat of a Roman army over 2,000 years ago have lessons for the 'War in Iraq', according to a new book.

Historian Dr Gareth Sampson from The University of Manchester says there are strong parallels between the defeat of the feared Roman General Crassus in Mesopotamia - modern day Iraq - and the American and British led invasion of the country in 2003 in 'The Defeat of Rome' - published this month.

He said: "If history repeats itself - and I fear it will - its not unreasonable to argue that the world may face centuries of conflict.

"The battle of Carrhae halted the expansion of the Roman Empire and was the culmination of a century long process of Rome's desire for international security.

"The model of international affairs used by the Roman Republic two thousand years ago follows a process of intervention, then occupation and finally annexation; a clear warning for today.

"But it set up 700 years of political instability and conflict, setting the scene for the rise of Islam and the opposition of East and West.

"But more immediately, it led to the civil war between Pompey and Caesar, the end of the Republic, and Dictatorship."

Dr Sampson says the Roman Republic's disastrous attack on the Parthian Empire in 53 BC led to 700 years of conflict and was the first failure of a great Western Empire to invade the region.

Though only 10,000 Parthians took on a 40,000 strong Roman Army there were huge Roman losses. At least 20,000 Romans were killed and another 10,000 taken into captivity.

Crassus was defeated by the brilliant Parthian General Surenas who for the first time solely relied on archers on horseback, helped by an unlimited supply of arrows from camels alongside.

This showed that superior military might could be defeated by a smaller and more tactically astute foe.

He added: "Crassus -who was famed and feared for defeating Spartacus - thought an easy victory against Parthia would improve his standing with Roman opinion.

"This was important for him as his rival Caesar was particularly popular at that time after his own successful invasion of Gaul - and Crassus felt he needed to similarly prove himself.

"But it was a disaster: the archers put the Romans under perpetual fire and seven Roman legions were defeated- and it was the biggest loss since Hannibal's defeat of the Romans in the summer of 216 BC.

"Crassus himself had his head and hands cut off and his gold filled skull went on display at the Parthian Court.

"The Parthian Empire- which stretched from modern day India to Iraq - more than matched the might of Rome."

Source: University of Manchester

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