



# COMITATUS

Warfare in the Dark Ages

3rd - 11th C AD

Game Scenario

**Meshike**

AD 244



## Historical Background

*"When I was first established over the dominion of the nations, the Caesar Gordian from the whole of the Roman Empire and the nations of the Goths and the Germans raised an army and marched against Assyria, against the nation of the Iranians and against us. A great battle took place between the two sides on the frontiers of Assyria at Meshike. Caesar Gordian was killed and we annihilated the Roman army. The Romans proclaimed Philip Caesar."* **Inscription of Shapur I at the Ka'ba-ye Zartosht.**

Meshike was the final battle in Emperor Gordian III's campaign against Sassanid Persia. He was only 19 at the time. Virtually nothing is known about the battle. It is only mentioned in Persian sources (see above) where it is portrayed as a great victory. The battle is glossed over by the Romans. What is known is that Gordian lost his life. He was either killed in battle or was murdered by his troops at the instigation of Philip the Arab. Either way Gordian died and Philip became Emperor, making peace with the Persians.

## The Game

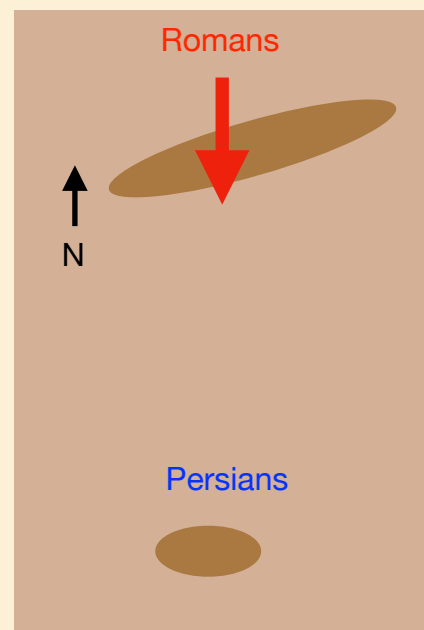
Despite earlier victories, Roman morale is not high as they are running low on supplies and Philip the Arab has been stoking discontent.

Following a previous defeat at Rhesaina, the Persian King Shapur has adopted a cautious approach — shadowing and harassing the Roman invaders. Now, with the enemy approaching his capital, he has to make a stand. He arranges to ambush the Romans on the march at Meshike, near modern-day Fallujah in Iraq.

He deploys his forces in a narrow flat plain suitable for his cavalry. The area is bounded by the Araxes river to the east and high ground to the west making it impossible for the Romans to bypass his position.

Advancing in column the Romans are unaware of the enemy blocking their advance. When their Vanguard crosses a ridge and they see the enemy light cavalry in front of them they begin to deploy for battle.

The game is lengthwise along the table with the Romans advancing in columns from the north and the Persians deployed to the south. There is a low hill in the Persian deployment area and a low ridge running across the Roman side of the table (from east to west). Otherwise the table is flat and featureless.



Players agree on between 900-1200 points per side. 900-1000 points is manageable as a two player game. More than that would be better with 2-4 players on each side.

## Persian Order of Battle

The Persian army is divided into four contingents: Vanguard, First Line, Second Line and Reserve. Shapur I is commander in chief, assisted by Narseh, Peroz, and Papak. Dice for leaders' LPs, re-rolling a 2 for Shapur (once only). If playing with 1000 points or less the First and Second Lines may be combined into one Main Line.

The Persian players may choose up to the agreed number of points from the following troops which they can organise into any number of units:

**8-20 Vassal Cavalry** - Heavy Horse Archers, B Grade, Average Morale,

**8 to 20 Persian Light Cavalry** - Light Horse Archers, C Grade, Average Morale

**4 to 8 Elite Cavalry** - Lance & Bow, A Grade, High Morale. Some or all of these will form the Comitatus of the leaders.

**up to 6 Cataphracts**, B Grade, Average Morale

**up to 12 Foot Archers** - C Grade, Average Morale

**up to 8 Skirmishers** - C Grade, slingers and/or javelin-armed, Average Morale

**up to 12 Levy Infantry** - Spear & Bow, C Grade, Low Morale

**up to 2 Elephants.**

**Players may upgrade units as follows:**

upgrade up to 2 Elite Cavalry to Exceptional Morale for Shapur's Comitatus

upgrade up to 2 Light Cavalry to B Grade, High Morale to serve as the vanguard leader's Comitatus.

upgrade up to 2 Cataphracts to High Morale to serve as a Comitatus for one of the leaders.

upgrade any or all Elite Cavalry to Armoured (riding armoured horses).

**Objective:** To block the Romans and to prevent them advancing on Ctesiphon.

## Roman Order of Battle

The Roman army is divided into three contingents: Vanguard, Main Body and Rear Guard. Gordian III (commander in chief) leads the main body. Philip the Arab commands the rearguard, his brother Priscus the vanguard. Gordian may be assisted by an additional leader (Jotapian) as a subordinate with the Main Body. Dice for leaders' LPs.

The Roman players may choose up to the agreed number of points from the following which they can organise into any number of units:

**8 to 16 Legionaries** - Roman Infantry, A Grade, Average Morale

**4 to 16 Auxiliaries** - LI Javelinmen, B Grade, Average Morale. Any or all of the Auxiliaries may instead be Roman Infantry

**2 to 8 Foot Archers** B Grade, Average Morale

**2-4 Goths** - Shock Cavalry, B Grade, Average Morale

**4-10 Equites**, B Grade, Average Morale

**2-4 Light Javelin Cavalry**, B Grade, Average Morale

**up to 8 Lanciarii (Legionary Light Infantry)** Skirmishers, A Grade, Average Morale.

**up to 4 Light Horse Archers**, B Grade, Average Morale

**up to 4 Arab Cavalry**, C Grade, Low Morale, May be camel mounted

**up to two Light Catapults**, Artillery.

**Baggage Train**, wagons & pack animals etc

**Players may upgrade units as follows:**

upgrade up to 3 Equites to A Grade, High Morale if forming a leader's Comitatus.

upgrade up to 2 Equites to Equites Singulares: A Grade, Exceptional Morale, if forming Gordian's Comitatus.

upgrade up to 2 Legionaries to High Morale as Praetorians.

**Objective:** To drive the Persians from the field so that they can continue their advance on Ctesiphon.

## Deployment

### Initial deployment:

Romans write down their order of march by unit for the the main body and rearguard. These are each in two columns with artillery and baggage in-between the columns of the main body. Leaders with their comitatus may also be between columns.

Romans place their vanguard on table up anywhere up to 12” in from Roman table edge. They may be fully deployed.

Persians then deploy their vanguard anywhere on table beyond 18“ of any Romans in any formation they wish.

*Play first turn.*

### Second turn:

In the leadership phase —

Roman players place the front of the two main body columns up to 12” in from their table edge, the rest falling in behind according to their order of march. They may move and/or deploy into lines in the movement phase.

Persian players deploy second line up to 12” in from their table edge in any formation they wish. They may also choose deploy the third and reserve lines, or hold one or both off table until later. Deployed contingents may move in the movement phase.

### Succeeding turns:

Romans continue to arrive in columns with rearguard following the main body until all are on table.

Persians may deploy any remaining contingents up to 12” in from their table edge and beyond 18” of any Romans. They may do this on the turn of their choosing.



