Economic and Military Aspects of Roman Provincialization
The Case of Roman Arabia

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Introduction

According to Roman political ideology, all regions in which Roman political and military directions (*imperia*) were (or were expected to be) followed belonged to the Roman Empire (*Imperium Romanum*). From a Roman perspective, therefore, the Empire included not only the provinces but also the territories of Rome's allied kings and dynasts beyond the provincial boundaries.[1] In these peripheral regions, Rome had various interests, among which business and trade played a major role. The allied kingdom of Nabataea on the borders of the provinces of Egypt, Syria, and Judaea is a point in case. During the second century BCE, the Nabataean kings began to control the northern sections of desert routes leading to the Persian/Arab Gulf as well as to the southern regions of the Arab Peninsula, from which frankincense was imported to the Mediterranean world. In his account of the incense trade, Pliny refers to the various places and dominions through which caravans had to pass on their way from Southern Arabia to Gaza and the Roman Empire and, thereby, gives a vivid impression of how the possession or control of the oases along the routes connecting the north and the south of the peninsula was a lucrative source of income.[2] Ancient South Arabian inscriptions record violent conflicts over the control of these oases from as early as the eighth and seventh centuries BCE. The Nabataean kingdom thus drew a great deal of its wealth from its control of the northern oases in the Hejas, the Wadi

1 Tac. *Ann.* 1,11,4. Suet., Aug. 101,4. Dio 56,33,2. See also Cic., Leg. 3,41 and cf. Speidel 2009, 54–58. The present text is a revised and updated version of Speidel 2021. I sincerely thank Eli Weaverdyke, Freiburg i. Brsg., for his help with adapting this contribution to the scope of the present volume.

2 Plin. *NH* 12.32.63–65.

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Sirhan, and elsewhere.[3] Strabo, in the last decades of the first century BCE, described the Nabataeans (and the Sabaeans in South Arabia) as subjects of the Romans and was full of praise for Nabataea's excellent laws and public administration, which allowed many Romans to reside there and trade in peaceful conditions.[4] We must, therefore, ask what exactly changed, in economic terms, when Rome took over the kingdom in 106 CE. Recent archaeological and epigraphic finds from the Arabian Peninsula shed important new light on many economic cultural and social changes that affected the Nabataean frontier zones as economic spaces when the Roman frontier province was established.[5]

Unfortunately, our written sources contain hardly any information regarding the reasons for the Roman invasion and occupation of Nabataea, nor about the circumstances and details of the military operations.[6] Perhaps local unrest following the death of Nabataea's last king, Rabbel II, early in 105, triggered the Roman intervention. In any event, Roman troops permanently occupied the former kingdom in 106; the royal Nabataean army was restructured and incorporated into the Roman military system; royal rule was replaced by a Roman provincial government; the capital was eventually moved from Petra to Bostra and renamed *Nova Traiana Bostra;* and state taxes and military service were now owed only to Rome.[7] These were, of course, profound changes, both for those living in the former kingdom and for the Roman state. Curiously, however, no grand celebration followed this achievement in Rome. Roman imperial coinage publicly commemorated the new acquisition only in 111 CE, i.e., four to five years after the occupation—*Arabia adquisita*.[8]

The question has, therefore, often been asked whether Marcus Ulpius Traianus, the emperor who ordered the invasion, pursued far-reaching geopolitical plans. To

3 For an excellent overview of the topic and the early epigraphic evidence, see Nebes 2014. For the Nabataeans policing the long-distance trade routes of Arabia in the first century CE, see also PME 20 and the evidence discussed below.

4 Strabo 16,4,21. For Roman hegemony of South Arabia established by Augustus, see Speidel 2015b and 2016a, 157–165; and now also Bowersock 2019, 231–233; Robin 2019. See also Macdonald 1994.

5 Speidel 2021.

6 All that survives is Dio 68.14.5 and Amm. 14.8.13. Cf., e.g., Bowersock 1983, 76 ff; Speidel 2009, 150 ff; Strobel 2019, 325 ff.

7 For a full account, see Bowersock 1983, 76–89 and most recently, Strobel 2019, 325–349, esp. 343, with recent literature. Strobel (2019, 328), however, is mistaken in claiming that *ala I Ulpia Dromedariorum* originally consisted of royal Nabataean camel riders (cf. below at n. 49). For Pompeius Falco (cos. 108), the governor of Judaea and commander of *legio X Fretensis* (CIL III 12117 = ILS 1036, cf. now also AE 2003, 1706), often referred to in this context; see Eck 2017, 97–99. On the impact of Trajan's takeover of the Nabataean kingdom on the Red Sea basin, see also Nappo 2018, 73 ff.

8 RIC Trajan 94–95; 244–245; 465–8; 610–615. Also cf. RIC Trajan 142–143. On Trajan's coinage in general, see Woytek 2010. See also below n. 25.

be sure, Trajan was remembered not only as Rome's *optimus princeps* but also as the Empire's most warlike leader, the *bellicosissimus princeps*.[9] No Roman emperor before Trajan (apart from Augustus) and no other after him added as much new territory to the Empire, even if most of it was soon lost or given up after his death. In the present context, the question we need to ask is whether the provincialization of the Nabataean kingdom in 106 was in any way directly connected to Trajan's infrastructure and military projects in the wider region, and therefore, whether they belonged to a greater geostrategic project or whether a greater emphasis should be placed on the potential economic motivations of this activity. As we will see, Trajan's takeover of the Nabataean kingdom (which was a loyal ally until 105) carries the hallmarks of an unforeseen and urgent reaction to local events rather than those of a premeditated plan. But this does not, *a priori*, invalidate the hypothesis of the previous existence of a geopolitical plan for the region that was immediately implemented as soon as a suitable occasion (i.e., the death of the last Nabataean king) arose.

A New Roman Naval Force and Its Infrastructure

One of the consequences of Trajan's takeover of the Nabataean kingdom in 105/6 was the extension of Rome's naval capabilities in the Red Sea. To be sure, there is evidence for Roman war ships in the northern parts of the Red Sea from as early as, it seems, the reign of Augusts;[10] yet Trajan appears to have renewed and enlarged this fleet and extended its range to the very south of the Red Sea basin. Thus, Eutropius and Festus relate that Trajan established a war fleet in the Red Sea (*in mari rubro classem instituit*) so that he could "lay waste to the borders of India," as Eutropius explains. Surely, "India" in this context was a reference to the southern parts of the Red Sea or the Gulf of Aden.[11] Jordanes adds that a statue of Trajan was set up *in mari Rubro*.[12] Documentary confirmation is provided by a Latin inscription from the first half of the second century that was found on the main island of the Farasān archipelago.[13] Only the lower right-hand corner survives. This fragment (often overlooked in recent accounts) dates, perhaps, from the twenties of the second century CE. It is set in a "tabula ansata" and attests building activities on the island. It reads as follows:[14]

9 Epit. 20.5. Cf. Dio 68.7.5. Speidel 2009, 121–165.
10 Speidel 2015b, 249 ff. for the evidence and a full discussion.
11 Eutrop., *Brev*. 8.3.2. Cf. also Festus 14 f. India: Mayerson 1993.
12 Jord., *Rom.* 268. Discussed in Speidel 2015b, 251.
13 AE 2005, 1640 = AE 2007, 1659. Cf. Villeneuve 2007, 23–25; Speidel 2007 = 2009, 639–640; Speidel 2015a, 89–90.
14 For the date and a partial restoration, see Speidel 2007 = 2009, 640. Cf. also Nappo 2018, 81.

- - -]

[- - -]VI FERR

[- - -]PR PR

Because of the highly formulaic nature of Latin building inscriptions, the letters PR PR in the last line of this Latin building inscription are doubtless to be understood as the remains of *pr(o) pr(aetore)* from the titulature of a Roman senatorial governor.[15] As is well known, the only Roman province on the Red Sea that was governed by a *legatus Augusti pro praetore provinciae* was *provincia Arabia*. Furthermore, the use of Latin in this part of the world, in which Greek was the common *lingua franca*, suggests a military context and therefore leaves no doubt that the letters -]VI FERR referred to *legio VI Ferrata*.[16] The reference to this legion provides a chronological frame for the date of this inscription, for *legio VI Ferrata* belonged to the garrison of the province of Arabia only for a short period of time after 114 and before 132/5(?).[17] The inscription thus attests the construction of a building, ordered by the governor of the province of Arabia, that was carried out by a detachment of Roman legionary soldiers. The soldiers from Arabia were later (in 144 at the latest) replaced by a detachment of *legio II Traiana* and auxiliaries from Egypt who were under the local command of a *praef(ectus) Ferresani portus (?) et Pont(i) Hercul(is)*.[18]

The legionary detachment of *legio VI Ferrata* from the new province of Arabia may, therefore, have completed construction works on the Farasan islands in the very last years of Trajan's reign or very early in Hadrian's reign. The military stronghold on the island could, therefore, have been established even a few years earlier.[19] The construction in stone betrays Rome's will to establish a permanent (at least in the

15 For the argument in full, see Speidel 2007 = 2009, 639–640. Cf. also Villeneuve 2007, 24, suggesting a number of other, yet unlikely, solutions. The concerns regarding this interpretation of the inscription expressed, e.g., by Villeneuve (2007, 24), Cobb (2018, 119), and Nappo (2018, 80 f.) are unnecessary.

16 Cf. Villeneuve 2007, 24.

17 Sartre 2005, 136–137. Speidel 2007 = 2009, 640; Nappo 2018, 81. For *legio VI Ferrata* in Judea, see Eck 2022.

18 AE 2004, 1643 = AE 2005, 1639 = AE 2007, 1659 (Farasan). Speidel 2007 = 2009, 635 ff.

19 Small finds of Nabataean pottery and coins on Farasān may, perhaps, hint at the existence of a Nabataean post prior to the establishment of Rome's military presence on Farasan, which, if true, also would have been a direct consequence of the Roman takeover of Nabataea: Villeneuve 2007, 20 n. 19; Speidel 2007 = 2009, 647; McLaughlin 2014, 132. At present, of course, this must evidently remain hypothetical (Bukharin 2011, 8–9; Nappo 2018, 82), but see Speidel 2015, 247–249 and Robin 2019 for evidence for and discussion of increased Nabataean influence in southern Arabia in the aftermath of the campaign of Aelius Gallus in 26/25 BCE.

mid-term) military presence in the southern Red Sea. Evidently, it was the purpose of the legionary detachment to impose Rome's will by the threat or the use of military means, be this by fighting "pirates" or by locally enforcing fiscal measures or a favored political order (a task for which legionary soldiers were particularly suited).[20] At any rate, the soldiers of *legio VI Ferrata* on Farasan must have had ships at their disposal, as they would otherwise hardly have been capable of fulfilling any task beyond the coastlines of their small island. Moreover, the establishment and upkeep of this post and its military garrison well over 1,200 km south of Roman Arabia's southernmost harbor at Leuke Kome could hardly have been carried out without further bases on the way or the support or consent of local allied rulers. It is most likely, therefore, that we need to assume the existence of a Rome-friendly network of local powers along the coasts of the Red Sea stretching from the southern borders of Egypt and Arabia to the Bab-el Mandab.

The Farasān detachment was perhaps established within the same context as another of Trajan's Red Sea projects, for the emperor is also known to have ordered, in 112 at the latest, major construction works on the canal that connected the Red Sea and the Nile in Egypt, which included a new harbor near Babylon at the tip of the Delta. This construction provided seasonal access to the Red Sea from the Pelusiac branch of the Nile.[21] Archaeological investigations of the remains of the new Trajanic harbor have produced remarkable results.[22] For the large size of the stone blocks that were used, the massive towers and the width of the entrance of over forty meters betray the confidence in the sense of this project that the planners and builders of Trajan's canal apparently had. Diocletian later rebuilt and fortified Trajan's harbor and, therefore, evidently shared his predecessor's confidence in its usefulness. Moreover, the remaining structures show surprising similarities in the layout of the Trajanic harbor with that of Diocletian, which suggests that Trajan's construction may have been as much a military installation as the fortress that Diocletian built to replace it.[23] If true, Trajan may have intended the canal, in the first instance, to be used by military ships.

20 Cf. Speidel 2016a, 160 ff. With Farasān laying over 1,200 km beyond the provincial territories of *provincia Arabia*, one wonders which role the archipelago could have played in the "defence" of the province or in Trajan's "reorganization of the eastern provinces" (cf. Nappo 2018, 80–82).

21 See esp. Oertel 1964; De Romanis 2002; De Romanis 2020, 36 ff; Aubert 2004; Adams 2007, 34 f.; Adams 2015; Jördens 2009, 417 ff.; Cooper 2009; Sheehan 2010, 35 ff.

22 Sheehan 2010.

23 Sheehan 2010, Fig. 26. Cf. also Not. Dign., or. 28.15: *legio tertiadecima gemina*: *Babilona*. Most recently, Strobel (2019, 330) argued again for economic considerations having been the true reasons for Trajan's investment into the Red Sea canal. De Romanis (2020, 36; 39) is undecided "whether the construction under Trajan of a new canal joining the Nile delta and the Red Sea was a consequence of, or a driving force for, the transformation of Rome's trade with India." For the enormous impact which the canal and the *via nova Traiana* eventually had on the trade through the Red Sea, particularly in Late Antiquity, see De Romanis 2020, 36 ff.

The canal would thus have afforded the passage of such vessels to reinforce the Red Sea fleet and, ultimately, to supply the post on Farasān as well as other naval bases.

New Roman Roads and Harbors: Military or Economic Installations?

Several scholars have concluded that the chronological proximity of Trajan's conquests and construction projects in the East betray a single overarching strategic plan pursuing economic or military objectives. Some believed this plan to concern the Red Sea basin; others even recognized military intentions linked directly to Trajan's Parthian war of 114–117 CE.[24] However, military considerations with regard to the Parthian war seem rather unlikely to have been at the root of Trajan's interventions in the region, for an attack on Parthia via the sea route or the former Nabataean kingdom, if it was ever intended, would surely have been launched at the very beginning of the campaign in 114. Yet it never was. Nor is there any evidence for a related dislocation of troops or for making military use of any of the new Roman constructions or institutions in the Red Sea basin or on the Arabian Peninsula during this war.

But do economic objectives impose themselves as compelling arguments for Trajan's activities in the wider region? To find answers, we need to take a closer look at the Roman infrastructural development after the Roman takeover of the Nabataean kingdom in 106. Thus, in 111 CE, Roman milestones were set up along a new formidable and plastered road, the *via nova Traiana*.[25] Their Latin inscriptions celebrated the completion of a major traffic axis that ran right through the urban heartland of Roman Arabia, connecting it first to the network of roads that linked up Roman Syria's cities, harbors, and military fortresses and then, ultimately, to the other provinces, Italy, and Rome. It is generally held that the *via nova Traiana* replaced an existing Nabataean route that is usually referred to as the "king's highway" and that this Roman highway was designed to serve as a major trade route, but also for military and administrative purposes. However, recent research has cast some doubt on such views. It has been

24 Most recently, Nappo (2018, 83), Strobel (2019, 325–331), and Stoll (2022, 61–62) suggested economic motivations. Nappo (2015, 69) speaks of a "master plan" for the Red Sea, "motivated by the potential for economic gain." McLaughlin (2014, 131), Aubert (2015, 35), and Cobb (2018, 118) contemplated military objectives connected to the Parthian War. De Romanis (2020, 36) remains undecided.

25 Many specimens survive; cf. e.g., CIL III 14149,23 = ILS 5834: *Imp(erator) Caesar / divi Nervae f(ilius) Nerva / Traianus Aug(ustus) Germ(anicus) / Dacicus pont(ifex) max(imus) / trib(unicia) pot(estate) XV imp(erator) VI co(n)s(ul) V / p(ater) p(atriae) / redacta in formam / provinciae Arabia viam / novam a finibus Syriae / usque ad mare rubrum / aperuit et stravit per / C(aium) Claudium Severum / leg(atum) Au[g(usti) pr(o) pr(aetore)]*. Cf., e.g., Bowersock 1983, 83; Isaac 1992, 119–121; Isaac 1998, 135 ff.; Graf 1995; Young 2001, 108 ff.; Kennedy 2004, 93 ff.; Sartre 2005, 139 ff.; Abudanah 2016.

pointed out that the steep gradients of the *via nova Traiana* through the great wadis, particularly through the Wadi al-Mujib, are unsuitable for heavily loaded camels and, thus, for caravan traffic altogether.[26] It is probably significant, therefore, that no remains of a constructed Nabataean predecessor road have yet been discovered along the stretch from Petra to Bostra where the *via nova Traiana* traversed the wadis and that no written source confirms the existence of this stretch of the route in the Nabataean period. Remarkably, however, a known Nabataean caravan route from Petra to Bostra passed much further to the East, thus avoiding the deep canyons.[27] If caravans indeed could not pass through the great wadis, the *via nova Traiana* was therefore hardly, in the first instance, constructed to serve as Rome's great trade route into Arabia. The true reasons for the construction of this major Roman road are spelled out (at least in part) on the famous milestones that were set up along its sides. This text describes, in Latin, the new extent of Roman direct rule from Syria to the Red Sea (*a finibus Syriae usque ad mare rubrum*: ILS 5834), echoing earlier such claims by Pompey.[28] Clearly, reaching the Red Sea was understood to be a powerful political statement. Trajan's new road, therefore, was essentially an imperial project that was intended to celebrate Rome's technical abilities and to demonstrate the extension of Roman direct rule *ad mare Rubrum*. It was to provide full access to the urban core of the new province and to integrate it into the empire's provincial territory.

Another observation appears to support this argument: what is known of the development of the harbor of Aila on the gulf of Akaba does not fit the theory of it having been a major trade hub at the end of the *via nova Traiana* in the first three centuries CE. Finds indicating that this harbor had commercial interactions of significance with the southern Red Sea or areas in the Indian Ocean before late antiquity appear to be absent from the archaeological record.[29] Nor do written sources suggest that Aila was of any significance as a port of trade during that period. Ptolemy calls it a village (κώμη), and Strabo and Pliny have nothing to say about a harbor but refer to Aila's overland connections through the surrounding deserts.[30] Josephus records that the Ptolemies established a port named Berenike in the vicinity. This port is now usually considered to be identical with Aila, but there is nothing to suggest that the

26 Borstad 2008. Cf. Speidel 2019, 57.

27 Parker 2006, 529; Borstad 2008.

28 See also Tacitus' statement precisely from these years: *[…] claustra olim Romani imperii quod nunc Rubrum ad mare patescit.* For a lengthy commentary, cf. Schneider 2015. Pompey: Plin. *NH* 7.26.97 (quoting from an inscription at a temple of Minerva): *Cn. Pompeius Magnus, imperator […] terris a Maeotis ad Rubrum mare subactis, votum merito Minervae*. Diodor 40,4 (translated from a Latin inscription at Pompey's theatre): *[…]* καὶ πάντα τὰ ἔθνη τὰ ἐντὸς τῆς Ποντικῆς καὶ τῆς Ἐρυθρᾶς θαλάσσης κατοικοῦντα *[…]*.

29 Parker 1996. Most recently: Sidebotham 2017, 129–132.

30 Ptol. 5.16.1; Strabo 16.2.30 and 16.4.4; Plin. 5.12.65.

foundation of Berenike led to a lasting upsurge of maritime trade and prosperity that would have justified the construction of a road on such a grand scale at the beginning of the second century CE.[31]

In fact, during the first three centuries CE, the main maritime trade route on the Arabian coast appears to have ended at the Red Sea port of Leuke Kome, much further to the South. Strabo reports that large caravans traveled via Hegra to Petra from this southernmost Nabataean harbor, which is possibly located at modern al-Wajh in Saudi Arabia.[32] A passage in the *Periplus Maris Erythraei* from the mid-first century CE concerning Leuke Kome claims that because of its port "and as a security measure, there is dispatched there also [*sc*. to Leuke Kome] the Receiver (παραλήπτης) of the Quarter Tax (τετάρτη) on incoming merchandise as well as a centurion (ἑκατοντάρχης) with a detachment of soldiers."[33]

This statement has caused a great deal of confusion and triggered an ongoing debate on whether the tax official, the officer, and the soldiers concerned, or even the harbor of Leuke Kome were Nabataean or Roman at that time. According to the perhaps most influential view, it was simply inconceivable that Roman authorities could have operated in a Nabataean harbor.[34] Yet this ignores that similar settings are indeed on record elsewhere.[35] Also, it seems very unlikely that both Nabataeans (at Leuke Kome) and Romans[36] should have each raised twenty-five percent customs duties on the same imports, thus adding a total of 56.25 percent to their price on Roman markets.[37] Such a practice would surely have brought about the immediate end of imports through the Nabataean kingdom. Moreover, a reader of the *Periplus* from the Greek-speaking provinces of the Empire is no doubt likely to have thought that the verb ἀποστέλλεται, "dispatched" (or "sent over"), was "more fitting for functionaries

31 Jos., Ant. 8.6.4 (160). Cf. Cohen 2006, 314 f.

32 Strabo 16.4.23–24. For el-Wajh as the likely location of Leuke Kome, see Nappo 2010; Nappo 2018, 35. For a different view (Aynuna), see Gawlikowski 2018.

33 PME 19. Διὸ καὶ παραφυλακῆς χάριν καὶ εἰς αὐτὴν (sc. Λευκὴ κώμη) παραλήπτης τῆς τετάρτης τῶν εἰσφερομένων φορτίων καὶ ἑκατοντάρχης μετὰ στρατεύματος ἀποστέλλεται. For the 25 percent import tax (tetartē / *maris rubri vectigal*), see, e.g., Jördens 2009, 355–370; Ast and Bagnall 2015; De Romanis 2020, 277 ff.

34 For the different positions and further bibliography, see, for instance, Bowersock 1983, 71; Casson 1989, 145; Young 1997; Cuvigny, O.Krok., 1435 with n. 22; Jördens 2009, 355–367, esp. 364–367; Ast and Bagnall 2015, 179–180; Nehmé 2018, 54; Nappo 2018, 98–107.

35 For Roman soldiers collecting the *capitulum lenoceni* tax in Chersonesus Taurica, see CIL III 13750 = IGRR I 860 = IOSPE² I 404. For allied kings paying Rome tribute, see Lucian, *Alex*. 57. Plin. *Ep*. 10.63 f. and 67; Jos. *BJ* 1.29.3. *AJ* 17.54 f. On the subject, see esp. Haensch 2009, 220 ff. On *regna* listed as assets in Augustus' *breviarium totius imperii*, see Speidel 2009, 55, 70 f. and 568 n. 33.

36 E.g., at Gaza: Plin. *NH* 12.32.64–65.

37 Thus, convincingly, Young 1997.

sent from outside than for those installed within their own state."[38] Above all, however, the presumably Greek-speaking reader from the Roman provincial world surely first associated the unspecified term ἑκατοντάρχης (the standard Greek translation for Latin *centurio*) with a Roman officer, not with a Nabataean one, as has been proposed because the Nabataeans occasionally used a transliteration of *centurio* (e.g., qnt.ryn') to denote a specific rank in their army.[39] If a reference to Nabataean qnt.ryn' (*vel. sim.*) had indeed been intended, one might expect the author of the *Periplus* to have used the Greek transliteration κεντύριων.[40] In any event, the Greek term ἑκατοντάρχης in no way recalls a Nabataean institution. Hence, the evidence very strongly points to a Roman customs control station with a small guard of Roman soldiers at Leuke Kome long before the Nabataean kingdom was turned into a Roman province by Trajan.

From a Roman point of view, there would, of course, have been a need for a Roman import monitoring station at Leuke Kome in order to prevent imported goods from evading the twenty-five percent import tax by unloading there rather than at the Egyptian ports of Myos Hormos or Berenike, where a parallel institution under the responsibility of a παραλήπτης (receiver) was in place—as is borne out by an ostracon from Krokodilô and two recently published inscriptions from the port town of Berenike.[41] It thus appears that the "receivers" in the Red Sea ports were charged with examining unloaded cargos and with establishing their composition and value. They would then send the relevant documentation onwards to stations inland, independently of the transporting caravans, so that the integrity of the cargo could be verified at the end of the desert journey by another set of homonymous officials. Taxes on imported goods from the eastern trade, however, were only paid in Koptos or Alexandria and in Gaza, or in Antioch (for those goods that were imported from or via Southern Mesopotamia).[42]

The continued importance of Arabia (and, of course, Egypt) for the import of Eastern goods even after it was turned into a Roman province is probably also reflected by Cassius Dio's Greek designation of the respective warehouses in the center of Rome, for his Greek name for the *horrea piperataria* is not (as the Latin term) based on the most important or iconic good stored there (i.e., pepper) nor on their origins (India and South Arabia, *viz.* "Saba"), but he describes them as the "warehouses of Egyptian

38 Thus Ast and Bagnall 2015, 180. See also Jördens 2009, 364–367.

39 The term used in the Nabataean army was qnt.ryn', qt.rywn' *vel. sim*. Nehmé 2017, 142; Nehmé 2018, 53.

40 Cf., e.g., SEG 19.783.

41 O. Krok. 1, l.26; Ast and Bagnall 2015 with a full discussion. Cf. Raschke 1978, 664; Young 1997, 267.

42 Gaza: Plin. *NH* 12.3265. Cf. Young 1997. Antioch: Starcky 1949, nos. 29 and 113. For Koptos as the mart for Indian, Arabian, and Ethiopian merchandise, see, e.g., Strabo 17.1.45; Plin. *NH* 5.11.60; Aristid., or. 36 ("Egyptian Discourse"), 115.

and Arab goods," which likely derives from the provinces through which these goods were mainly imported (and taxed).[43]

Before the Roman takeover, the Nabataeans controlled the northern end of the network of trade routes that connected South Arabia and the Persian Gulf with the Mediterranean coast. This included the trade corridor to the Persian Gulf through the Wadi Sirhan in the Arabian desert, which, before the Roman takeover, was guarded (at least at times) by Nabataean soldiers.[44] Two Latin inscriptions clearly attest Roman military control of the Wadi Sirhan since the early third century CE.[45] The assumed lack of second-century archaeological and epigraphic evidence from the Wadi Sirhan has led several scholars to believe that Trajan, in 106, renounced (or simply did not care to take) control of this route from the Nabataeans, despite his decision to establish the provincial capital at Bostra. According to this theory, it was only Septimius Severus who brought this trade route and the oasis town of Dumata (Dûmat al Jandal, Saudi Arabia) at the wadi's southeastern exit under Roman control.

However, recent archaeological and epigraphic findings in this region (al-Jawf and Sakākā) suggest a very different reconstruction of Trajan's decision concerning this region; for not only were the remains of a watchtower discovered at Dumata that was in constant use from the first to the fourth century CE, but second-century graffiti in Nabataean script and language from soldiers of Roman army units were also discovered not far from Dumata.[46] It therefore seems very likely that Trajan, as with all other Nabataean strongholds, also immediately occupied the important military checkpoints on this caravan route in 106 (or immediately afterwards). Evidently, to the Romans, too, it mattered who was in control of the oases.[47]

New archaeological and epigraphic finds from the region of Hegra (Medâ'in Sâlih, Saudi Arabia) suggest that a parallel development took place along the old "incense route." Again, it was held that this major Nabataean settlement was abandoned soon

43 *Horrea piperataria*: Chron. a. 354, p. 16f. 64 (*Chron min*. I 146); AE 1994, 297; Dio 73,24,1: τὰς ἀποθήκας τῶν τε Αἰγυπτίων καὶ τῶν Ἀραβίων φορτίων.

44 Trade corridor: Plin. *NH* 6.32.146; Ptol. 5.19.7. Nabataean soldiers (in 44 CE): Savignac and Starcky 1957; Bowersock 1983; 154–159. For further literature on the Wadi Sirhan (and on the inscription), cf., e.g., Speidel 1992, 369–370; Isaac 1992, 126; Christol and Lenoir 2001, 164–165; Young 2001, 83, 85, 99–100, 104.

45 AE 2001, 1979 (Dumata): *Pro salute / domm(inorum) nn(ostrorum) Augg(ustorum) / I(ovi) O(ptimo) M(aximo) Hammoni et San/cto Sulmo / Fl(avius) Dionysi/us |(centurio) leg(ionis) III Cyr(enaicae) / v(otum) s(olvit)*. – AE 1987, 964 = AE 1996, 1623 (Azraq): *-] PE[---]L[--]V[--]LSSSV[-] / legg(ionum) XI Kl(audiae) et VII Kl(audiae) / et I Ital(icae) et IIII Fl(aviae) et / I Ill(yricorum) praetensione / concata mil(itibus) suis ex / leg(ione) III Kur(enaica)(!) a Bostra / Dasianis m(ilia) p(assuum) LXVI et / a Basienisa m(ilia) p(assuum) XXX / et a Bamata Dumata / m(ilia) p(assuum) CCVIII.*

46 Graffiti: Nehmé 2017, 148–150. Watchtower (L2018): Charloux 2016, 206–228. Roman finds from Dumata: Charloux, Cotti, and Thomas 2014, 200.

47 For a Roman statement to this effect, see Plin. *NH* 12.32.64–65.

after Rome took direct control of the kingdom;[48] yet Latin, Greek, and Nabataean inscriptions and graffiti from in and around Hegra from the second and early third (?) centuries attest the regular (or at least repeated) local presence of soldiers and officers of *legio III Cyrenaica* as well as horsemen of *ala I Ulpia dromadariorum Palmyrenorum milliaria* and *ala veterana Gaetulorum* in Hegra and its surroundings (Jabal Athlab and route to Al-ʿUlâ).[49] Two inscriptions recently discovered in Medâʾin Sâlih name legionary *stationarii* (evidently of *legio III Cyrenaica*), soldiers dispatched to an outpost (*statio*), as known also from Egypt's eastern desert.[50] Another inscription as well as graffiti also mention *eq(uites) dro(medarii)* (no doubt of *ala I Ulpia dromedariorum Palmyrenorum*), all soldiers of the kind that were also employed along the routes through the Egyptian eastern desert.[51] Even a second-century Roman military camp was recently discovered at Hegra.[52] The stationing of Roman soldiers in the Hejaz desert around 900 km south of the provincial capital Bostra at this location on the old incense route can hardly have served any other purpose than the control and protection of the caravan trade between the Mediterranean and southern Arabia. *Ala I Ulpia dromedariorum Palmyrenorum milliaria* is of particular interest for the history of the new province (and, of course, for Palmyra's history), for according to its name, the unit was set up by Trajan from 1,000 Palmyrenian camel riders. As the *ala* is attested in Arabia by military diplomas of the years 126, 142, and 145 (and nowhere else in the first half of the second century CE), the regiment presumably was part of Arabia's initial Roman garrison.[53] If this is true, it betrays the comprehensive efforts to integrate the new province into the structures and fabrics of the Empire, and the importance Trajan and the imperial authorities attached from the very beginning to

48 Cf., e.g., Graf 1988; Shahid 1989, 476; Hackl, Jenni, and Schneider 2003, 55–56.

49 Inscriptions and Graffiti: Jaussen and Savignac 1914, 644–649; Seyrig 1940, 163; Speidel 1984, 245–248; Sartre 1982, 30–33; Graf 1988, 192–196; Young 2001, 109 f.; Sipilä 2004, 320; Al-Tahli and Al-Daire 2005 (= AE 2004, 1620); Speidel 2009, 633 ff.; Villeneuve 2015, 23 ff., 37 ff.; Nehmé 2018, 52–54. Fiema et al. 2020. For the date of the graffiti, cf. the name *Ulpius Magnus* of one of the horsemen of *ala dromadariorum* mentioned in the graffiti along the route to Al-ʿUlâ. A*la I Ulpia dromadariorum Palmyrenorum milliaria* is attested as part of the Roman army in *provincia Arabia* by military diplomas of the years 126, 142, and 145: AE 2004, 1925; AE 2016, 2014; Eck and Pangerl 2016. In the years 153 and 157, the unit was stationed in Syria: Weiss 2006, esp. 283.

50 Fiema et al. 2020, n° 1 (180-183), and n° 8 (190-191). Cf. already Villeneuve 2015, 34 ff. and Speidel 2019, 59. In two other cases (Fiema et al. n° 2 and n° 6), the reading of the single letter S and the restoration of the term *s(tationarius)* is doubtful. Eastern desert: see, e.g., O.Claud. I 68 (Trajanic, checking travel permits), Sidebotham 2011, 166.

51 Fiema et al. 2020, n° 12 (193). Graffiti: cf. above n. 49. For a full discussion of this evidence, see Speidel 2019, 59-61. Cf. also Stoll 2022. For *dromedarii* in the Roman army in general, cf., e.g., Dąbrowa 1991; Young 2001, 147 f.; 155 f.; Gatier 2017.

52 Fiema and Villeneuve 2018.

53 Thus also Gatier 2017, 284. Military diplomas: see above, n. 49.

the safety of the desert caravan routes; for Palmyrenian camel riders were, of course, experts in providing security on routes leading through deserts.

Finally, an altar from between 213/4 and 217 that was set up in Hegra by one Aurelius Gloriosus, a *libertus Augusti* and *adiutor tabulariorum,* attests this man's (temporary) local presence.[54] As an imperial freedman and an aid of bookkeepers, Gloriosus evidently belonged to the staff of the financial *procurator* of the province of Arabia and was attached to the procuratorial archives.[55] The dedication of his altar not only to the immortal gods and goddesses and the health of Caracalla and of his mother Julia Domna but specifically also to *Mars conservator,* to the *genius hospiti(i),* and to *Fortuna Redux* suggests that Gloriosus had, on the one hand, been on an important official mission to the Roman troops on the empire's remote southern frontier at Hegra that, at least in part, concerned aspects of the long-distance trade with the South and that, on the other hand, he hoped for divine protection on his journey from and to Gerasa, where the *procurator* of Arabia resided.[56] What is known of the activities and tasks of other *tabularii* and their *adiutores* supports the notion that Gloriosus' mission was most likely connected to the documentation of logistical and/or fiscal matters at this southernmost outpost of *legio III Cyrenaica* in the province of Arabia.[57]

Let us now return to the question of to what extent economic objectives may have motivated Trajan and his advisors to take over and provincialize the Nabataean kingdom. As we have seen, the Roman fiscal infrastructure at the Nabataean harbor of Leuke Kome ensured that the lucrative maritime trade with Southern Arabia, East Africa, and India was already fully integrated into the Roman economy before Trajan's takeover of the kingdom. Moreover, Rome benefited from the successful economic, political, and military activities of her Nabataean allies with regard to long-distance trade. Therefore, it remains questionable whether replacing the former Nabataean services and installations along the great overland and maritime trade routes by setting up Roman ones in their stead in 106 would, by itself, have appealed to the Roman emperor as a sensible and profitable plan.[58] Nor is there evidence to suggest that the

54 Fiema et al. 2020, n° 15 (195-197).

55 Thus correctly Stoll 2022, 83–87 (yet *pace* Stoll 2022, 86, Gloriosus cannot have been a true member of the *tabularium legionis*, as being a freedman, he evidently had no right to serve in the army. Nor is there anything to connect Gloriosus' presence at Hegra with Caracalla's Parthian War, *pace* Stoll 2022, 86).

56 For *hospitium* and long-distance trade, see Dig. 49,15,5,2 (Pomponius) with Speidel 2016a. Cf. Stoll 2022, 87 and n. 107 with the observation that dedications to similar *genii* (*commercii*, *negotiantium*) have also been found at several other Roman military bases on the frontiers. Gerasa: Sartre 2005, 134.

57 See, e.g., Rossignol 2014, *passim* and France and Nelis-Clément 2014, *passim*. Cf. also Speidel 2009, 340–342; De Romanis 2020, 317 with n. 92.

58 As, e.g., Strobel (2019, 326) assumes. For Rome economically benefiting from her Nabataean allies, see, e.g., Speidel 2016a, 171–174; Speidel 2016b, 293; Speidel 2019.

great *via nova Traiana* was constructed to serve as a major trade or military route after the Roman provincialization. This is, of course, not to say that the Roman takeover of the Nabataean kingdom and the new Roman infrastructure projects and advanced bases did not impact significantly on various economic aspects and developments regarding the Red Sea basin. Thus, for instance, Rome's increased influence in the southern Red Sea in the early second century appears to be reflected by a new series of coins which the kingdom of Saba, now for the first time, began to mint to the standard of the Roman *denarius*.[59] However, the good relations with the Nabataeans before 105 CE, the apparently unexpected circumstances that led to the Roman takeover, and the volume of the investments necessary to replace Nabataean infrastructure and institutions that came with provincialization do not necessarily suggest that the intention to increase the Roman treasury's income was Trajan's foremost incentive to occupy and provincialize the Nabataean kingdom.

A Policy of Peace and Order as an Economic Consequence of Roman Provincialization

Nevertheless, once provincialization was put into effect, the evidence clearly bears out that Rome's measures and investments into military and other infrastructure naturally included the intention to protect long-distance trade and to increase the flow and volume of trade, thereby maximizing the institutional capabilities of raising fiscal income for the Roman treasury.[60]

Rome's marked interest in the long-distance trade routes through the Red Sea basin are, of course, not at all surprising if we consider the gigantic sums that the imperial treasury collected as taxes on imports from the East via this route; for, according to some recent estimates based on figures transmitted by ancient historiography, geographical works, and documentary evidence, the revenues from the twenty-five percent import tax (*tetartē*) might have amounted to a sum that could have covered most of the regular expenses for the Roman army.[61] Losing control of Nabataea and, subsequently, maybe even of further parts of the Red Sea basin were, therefore, surely not an option Rome would ever have chosen to consider, in 105/6 or at any other

59 Huth 2010, 104 ff.

60 Thus also Wilson 2015, 21. For the importance of such considerations, see, e.g., Strabo 2.5.8 and 4.5.3; 3.4.20. Suet., Nero 18. App., *Praef.* 5. 7. 15. Cf. Speidel 2009, 42 ff. and 71 f. (with further references).

61 McLaughlin 2014, 88–94; Speidel 2015a, 104 f.; Speidel 2016a, 165; Wilson 2015, 23; Cobb 2018, 115 f. Cf., however, Scheidel 2015, 160–161, n. 44.

time in its history. A tenacious internal dispute over the succession to the kingdom's throne hence made Rome's intervention inevitable.

Epictetus, a Phrygian contemporary of these events, offers comments on Trajan's wars. Even though, in his view, all wars (including Trajan's) were the result of ignorance, he conceded that Trajan's wars did achieve some laudable results: "For you see that Caesar appears to furnish us with great peace, that there are no longer enemies, nor battles, nor great associations of robbers, nor of pirates, but we can travel at every hour and sail from east to west." [62] There can be little doubt that Epictetus was quoting official positions, for peace indeed played a prominent role among the ideological messages that Trajan (and other Roman governments) circulated in Rome, Italy, and throughout the Empire. Coinage, of course, was the main (but not the only) medium of dissemination.[63] But peaceful conditions and regional security (on Roman terms) were no doubt precisely what Trajan and his successors aimed for in the Red Sea basin. They were necessary conditions for prosperity and the flow of trade and, therefore, not only were among the most prominent concepts conveyed by imperial propaganda but also led Roman governments to invest great amounts of resources into fortifying, securing, and controlling those routes on the fringes of provincial territory that were particularly threatened by brigandage.[64] A great many forts, watchtowers, and soldiers guarded these routes, even though the existence of the Empire was not threatened by external enemies of any significance in these remote parts.

After Trajan turned the Nabataean kingdom into a province in the year 106, Roman coins were issued (in 111 CE) showing personified Arabia as having accepted Roman peace, for she is holding the olive branch over a camel, the symbol of her country. But the camel was also the symbol of trans-Arabian long-distance trade. Imposing peace in Arabia, therefore, surely also implied peace and security for major stretches of the trans-Arabian (and maritime) trade routes of the Red Sea basin. In this, Trajan may have been obliged by the ideal Augustus had established in the region.[65]

62 Epictetus 3.13.9. See also 1.25.15 (for Trajan being meant, see Birley 1997, 61) and 2.22.22.

63 For *Pax* in Trajan's coinage see, for instance, the *denarii* RIC Trajan 16 (98–99 CE); 102 (103–111 CE); 189 (103–111 CE). See also Woytek 2010.

64 See, for instance, OGIS 701 = IGRR I 1142 = I.Pan 80 = SB V 8908 (+ p. 551) (Antinoopolis, 137 CE): διὰ τόπων ἀσφαλῶν καὶ ὁμαλῶν παρὰ τὴν Ἐρυθρὰν θάλασσαν ὑδρεύμασιν ἀφθόνοις καὶ σταθμοῖς καὶ φρουρίοις διειλημμένην … Bagnall and Sheridan 1994. Malalas 18,15 (433) (*ad a.* 528/29 n. Chr.). The Chronicle of Zuqnin, 54 (*ad a.* 846 = 534/35 n. Chr.). Cf., e.g., Witakowski 1996, 51; Cuvigny 2003; Kennedy 2004, 93 ff.; Sartre 2005, 139 ff.; Sartre 2007, 313–318; Speidel 2015b, 295–296; Speidel 2016a, 161 and 164; Nehmé 2015; Haensch 2016. Cf., e.g., Speidel 2016a, 161–164; Cobb 2018, 92–112; Speidel 2019.

65 Cf. Philo, *Leg. ad Gaium* 146 with Mommsen 1904, 615; Speidel 2015b, esp. 242–249 and 252.

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