THE LATE ROMAN FRONTIER IN ARABIA: A LANDSCAPE OF INTERACTION

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ABSTRACT

The study argues that the late Roman frontier in Arabia is best viewed as a transitional contact zone in which peoples of diverse economies, identities and beliefs interacted broadly to create a new fusion unique to the zone itself, and thus a new center in the face of the imperial margins of Rome and Persia. This zone was then a conduit through which cultures, materials and ideas were exchanged and reformed. Moreover, this zone acted as a bridge for the societies and governments on either side in which the frontier as center held agency.

This project forwards a historiographic consciousness which operates free of boundaries and engages theory and methodology across the fields of ancient and modern scholarship. The governing ideal is to take the grounding of the empirical approach and combine it with the intellectually creative outlook and methods of postmodern history. Material culture in the form of archaeological, epigraphic, geographic and aerial imagery are given a leading role in order to qualify and enrich the context of the traditional literary record. This also allows the local to speak more clearly over the biases inherent in the Greco-Roman sources. Further, Arabic historiographic sources are used to look back into the preserved oral history of the frontier peoples.

This dissertation engages multiple dimensions of the frontier which in turn work together to view the frontier as center. The physical geography of the region defines the zone and how it interacts with surrounding regions. Communications, economic and defensive concerns linked the desert with the settled zone and the larger economic and political context. Nomadic peoples controlled the frontier center, negotiated positions of power and became forces of influence on Rome and Persia itself. Voices of faith at the local engage imperial orthodoxy, create new religious identities, and span the divide between the pre-Christian, Christian and Islamic periods.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Dedicated to my daughter Emma and my friend Suzanne Lewandowski

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INTRODUCTION: THE FRONTIER CRUCIBLE

The spaces where forces meet are places of change, reformation and transformation. The more intense the forces, the more profound the shift: fire meets metal in the forge creating new alloys, tectonic plates converge under great pressure raising great mountain ranges, opposing cultures meet to form new peoples, or push each other away, leaving neither the same as before. Deserts have been such spaces throughout history, seemingly empty wastelands yet often places of conflict and transition, conduits for the movements of peoples and resources, birthplaces for new cultures and religions. The desert is not a space for the static. Arabia is a prime example of the desert as place of movement, change and genesis.

Here Arabia is viewed as a physical geographic zone as opposed to a political entity as in the modern Saudi Arabia. This zone comprises what is now parts of several countries: southern Syria, southern Iraq, Jordan, eastern Israel, Bahrain, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Oman and Yemen. The Arabian peninsula is a varied land with some of the harshest deserts in the world occupying the central zone combined with semi-arid and arable areas along its edges from north to south. The area in orange on the political map below denotes this zone. For comparison the accompanying satellite image indicates the physical desert and transitional zones from beige to green along the peripheries. The transitional extremes of this space have an important role in the unique context and transformative power of the region. Empires such as the Hellenistic, Rome and Persia declined to expand their power directly into the desert itself due to the physical difficulties and limited economic and political advantages to be gained in doing so. This left the desert peoples themselves a certain independent center of gravity politically, socially and culturally which is important in understanding Arabia as a place of innovation.

Figure 1: Political Map of Arabian Peninsula

Figure 2: Physical Map of Arabian Peninsula

From antiquity to today, this geographic zone has exercised great influence on the course of events throughout the Near East, Mediterranean and planet at large. In the seventh century C.E. Arabia saw the birth of a monumental force of change, the religion of Islam. Within a few decades Islam spread from its beginnings in the desert caravan city of Mecca to control nearly the entire area formerly controlled by the Roman, Persian and Indian empires with the exception of present day Italy, Greece, France and Germany. Politically and culturally, Islam was the kernel of new empires in the form of the Arabs and Seljuk/Ottoman Turks, the last of which held dominion until World War I. Islamic culture itself was a product of absorbing the previous Greek, Roman, Persian and Indian cultures which came before, contributing its own advancements and translating this all to the world via its lingua franca Arabic.

This dissertation is not about Islam however. It presents a new view of pre-Islamic Arabia as the crucible from which Islam rose. In viewing pre-Islamic Arabia as a center in its own right, existing independently on its own political, cultural and religious axis, acting with its own agency and identity, the unique forces of the region become clear amidst the succeeding waves of the Hellenistic, Roman and Persian empires. The ways in which Arabia as center reacted to imperial forces from the third through sixth centuries culminated in a context ripe for the rise of Islam in the seventh century. This is particularly evident in the religious sphere, as Roman Christian orthodoxy sought to tighten its grip on local expression of faith in the two hundred years before Islam, one can see an increasing resistance to conformity among bishops in the liminal zone between the settled and the nomadic along the Arabian frontier with Rome. Arabian participation in Church councils of this era provide the lens to view the rising alienation and assertion of local religious identity.

Furthermore, the nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples of Arabia played an important role in the spread of Islam from the beginning, lending an independent martial energy and movement to the new faith which drove it rapidly across the desert spaces of Arabia, North Africa and Syria and on into the vast steppes of Asia to India. In centering these nomadic peoples in the story of pre-Islamic Arabia, one sees a force which was skilled and active in seizing every advantage in their dealings with the empires around them, remaining the true dominating power in their own desert element. Indeed, the wars between Rome and Persian in late antiquity only served to strengthen nomadic dominance as these peoples formed into larger and more centralized confederacies under external pressures. Moreover, archaeological evidence shows that the local along the Arabian frontier became more vibrant and prosperous as the Roman Empire increasingly withdrew and waned into the sixth century. Arab nomadic confederacies remained to form the corps for the expansion of Islam in the next century.

Much has been made of an assumed opposition between the settled agricultural and arid semi-nomadic and nomadic peoples of Arabia. A significant contribution to this assumption has been the traditional Greco-Roman literary sources which paint the picture a frontier divide, using the imperial language of civilized versus savage. This dissertation looks beyond these binary narratives to epigraphic and archaeological sources viewed within the theoretical framework of a broad transitional zone. [1] The picture presented here is one of connection and continuity across the arable and arid regions along the Arabian frontier. A spectrum of identity and cultural expression becomes evident in which the peoples of the settled and nomadic zones were in fact one and the same, moving freely across the geographic expanse as economic and other needs

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[1] As in C.R. Whittaker, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire: A Social and Economic Study* (Baltimore and London, 1994); H. Elton, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire* (Bloomington, IN, 1996).

dictated. A closer look at the physical forts and defenses of the Roman frontier shows that their intention was to create the implication of control and presence rather than an actual barrier across the zone. Thus, the frontier was open to be the conduit for the exchange of new ideas and cultural elements across the zone, providing the context for Islam as an heir of Greco-Roman intellectual, religious and cultural precedents.

Hence, the chapters of this dissertation work together to engage and intervene in the history of frontier theory with a model in which pre-Islamic Arabia speaks for itself through the physical land, its peoples and its faith. The frontier becomes a region of contact, independence, movement and fertility where existing elements and forces within and without combine to create the foundation for the rise of Islam.

CHAPTER ONE:
DEVELOPMENT OF THE FRONTIER:
CONTEXT AND THEORY

The geographic focus of this study is the region of the Near East bounded roughly by the Jordan River in the west and by the volcanic plateau of the Hauran which runs from southern Syria and eastern Jordan across the Iraqi border to the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula to the south. This area comprises the transitional zone from the settled borders of the Roman and Persian empires into the open deserts of Arabia down to Yemen and Oman. This project is the study of peoples, events and identities on the limits of settlement, but the topic cannot be well understood without reference to the greater context of the development of the Near East as a whole from Neolithic times.

The story is one of geographic diversity of resources. The Taurus mountains of Anatolia, the Zagros range of eastern Iran and the coastal mountain range of the Levant provided areas of sufficient rainfall which gradually gave rise to formal agriculture from the eleventh to seventh millennia B.C.E. Agriculture provided the impetus for a transition from seasonal nomadic cultures to year-round settlement in certain micro-regions which supported the domestication of cereal and animal crops.[1] This move to permanent settlement took place alongside the traditional nomadic or semi-nomadic cultures, and there was movement back and forth between the two economies with climatic fluctuations and variation across micro-regions.[2] Such variation, fluctuation and economic diversity played a strong role throughout the period of this study and into modern times.

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[1] M.Van de Mieroop, *A History of the Ancient Near East* (Oxford, 2004), 10-11. For a general introduction see W. von Soden, *The Ancient Orient: An Introduction to the Study of the Ancient Near East* (Grand Rapids, MI, 1994).

[2] Van de Mieroop (2004), 12. See also A. Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East c. 3000-330 B.C.* (London, 1995).

From 9000 to 7000 B.C.E. a marked increase in continuous permanent settlement occurred in the archaeological record. The development of fired pottery was significant in this as it allowed the long-term storage of crops, allowing a buffer against the effects of climatic variations. From 7000 B.C.E., full-fledged agricultural villages became established in the highland areas of the Near East with sufficient rainfall for sustained settlement.[3] As population densities increased, the next trend was expansion out of the highlands and into semi-arid plains along rivers, such as the Tigris, Euphrates, and Jordan. In this case, irrigation techniques were developed to allow settlement of areas not otherwise suited to sustained agriculture. The first such irrigation networks were at the foot of the Zagros mountains and on the edges of the Babylonian marshes. Control of the rivers was particularly crucial in Mesopotamia, where the Tigris and Euphrates rivers proved unpredictable. The planting season came when the water levels were lowest, only to be followed by rising waters in the spring, which would overwhelm the seedlings if not strictly controlled with dikes and channels. Furthermore, once irrigated, there was no natural way to drain the fields and evaporation led to increased soil salinity. Nevertheless, by 6000-5500 B.C.E. gradual mastery of these difficulties led to expansion of large scale irrigation and permanent settlement across the Mesopotamian plain.[4]

Centralization and Urbanization

As permanent settlement spread and population densities increased, societies became increasingly centralized, complex and interconnected via trade along the river systems. A succession of empires developed from 5500 B.C.E., at first dividing the cultivated zone of

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[3] Van de Mieroop (2004), 12. See also M. Liverani, *Antico Oriente: Storia, Società, Economia*. Nuova edizione aggiornata (Rome, 2011).

[4] Van de Mieroop (2004), 12-13.

Mesopotamia and the Levant between the Halaf culture in the north and the Ubaid in the South. By 4500 B.C.E. the Ubaid had asserted their control over the whole of Mesopotamia and the Levant from north to south. This would become only the first of a succession of centralized imperial powers to trade control of the settled zones of the Near East up to the Persian and Roman eras. [5]

A hallmark of this new centralization was the growth of social hierarchy centered around an elite based on the control of agricultural resources, long distance trade in luxury goods, and connection with the development of central religion focused on temple structures. The first of these was at Eridu in southern Mesopotamia around 5500 B.C.E. Such structures seemed to serve both a religious role and center for the collection/distribution of agricultural products. These centers formed the foundation for the growth of large-scale urban centers organized as city-states in the succeeding era.[6] This "urban revolution" was characterized by the development and growth of the essential elements of later advanced city-states in the region and beyond. Exemplified by early centers such as Uruk in southern Mesopotamia, these included large permanent populations, a central governing hierarchy and bureaucracy, social complexity/labor specialization, development of written communication and record-keeping systems, control of smaller villages surrounding the city, and most crucial of all, center for production and exchange of agricultural and trade goods centered on the temple/exchange complex itself. Centralization progressed through the succeeding millennia resulting in the formation of large-scale empires, exemplified by the Sumerian (2900-2350 B.C.E.) and Akkadian (2334-2004 B.C.E.) periods.

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[5] Van de Mieroop (2004), 15.

[6] Van de Mieroop (2004), 16-17. For the urban revolution see also S. Moscati, *The Face of the Ancient Orient: A Panorama of Near Eastern Civilizations in Pre-Classical Times* (New York, 1962).

The rise of the Babylonians in the following period brought the increasing role of nomadic peoples in the region, a development of importance to this study.[7]

Babylonian Reunification and the Rise of Nomadic Influence

Following the decline of Akkad, within a few decades power had gravitated back to Ur in southern Mesopotamia. Although less militaristic and more diplomatic than the Akkadian era, this era continued many of its ruling practices, such as emphasis on bureaucracy, taxation and particularly record keeping. The Third Dynasty of Ur (2100-2000 B.C.E.) withdrew from the far-flung reaches of Akkadian control in favor of a tightly run center in Mesopotamia proper with a provincial organization under royal governors and cemented by familial bonds.[8]

The decline of the Third Dynasty of Ur coincided with a rise in the influence of semi-nomadic peoples in the region in the early second millennium. The two main peoples associated with this were the Elamites from Iran and the Amorites from northern Syria.[9] Although often painted as aggressive foreign invaders, significant numbers of these peoples already lived within the bounds of the Babylonian rule and were integrated into its society on the margins. The weakening of the Third Dynasty of Ur allowed the Elamites and particularly the Amorites to grow stronger, more independent and become a more formidable threat to Mesopotamia proper.[10]

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[7] Van de Mieroop (2004), 20ff. See also J.M. Sasson, ed., *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*. 4 vols. (New York, 1995) for this period.

[8] Van de Mieroop (2004), 75.

[9] Van de Mieroop (2004), 83.

[10] Van de Mieroop (2004), 83-84.

Nomadic and semi-nomadic pastoralists had always been a fixture of early Near Eastern cultures. Mention of them in the sources fluctuates according to their level of interaction with settled peoples.[11] As with the Greeks and Romans, literary references to nomads of this era betray a vague understanding of of their origins and cultures. For example, the name Amorite itself derives from the name Akkadian word *amurru*, which simply means "west." So, the Amorites are known simply as "westerners," alluding to their origins in western Syria. Accordingly, such terms also do not denote any distinct ethic or kinship group, but simply those grouped roughly under a semi-nomadic way of life.[12]

The economy of these semi-nomadic peoples centered on the raising of sheep and goats for their natural products, from dairy to skins and bones. They came into seasonal contact with the settled areas due to annual climatic fluctuations. In the winter increased precipitation on the steppe allowed them to graze their flocks away from the rivers. In the summer they brought their herds into the villages to graze in fallow fields and trade their produce for goods available in the villages. Thus, a level of symbiosis existed between the two cultures.[13] Sometimes, nomads transitioned fully to the sedentary life. These were usually people who were either very wealthy or very poor. Wealth gave them the luxury of the sedentary lifestyle or poverty made it necessary

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[11] Van de Mieroop (2004), 86-87. An example of such sources are the Mari letters, which were tablets recording diplomatic activities found at the site of Mari in Syria, on the fringes between Babylonia and Syria. These documents give details on interactions between nomadic and settled peoples. Other such archives exist from other areas of the Babylonian frontiers. (Van de Mieroop, 87) See also C.S. Ehrlich, ed., *From an Antique Land: An Introduction to Ancient Near Eastern Literature* (Lanham, MD, 2009).

[12] Van de Mieroop (2004), 87. See also R. Buillet, *The Camel and the Wheel* (Cambridge, MA, 1975).

[13] Van de Mieroop (2004), 88.

to become laborers.[14] This situation remains relatively unchanged throughout the scope of this study and into the modern age.[15]

Internally, nomadic peoples were organized around kinship-based structures, with an actual or mythical founder. Relations between nomadic groups were in constant flux, with some peoples fracturing from their primary group or absorbing other groups. External control of the nomads varied according to their location. When nomads were in closer proximity to settled areas, records show that they were often subject to a level of political control including taxation and military service.[16] This resonates with similar policies of the Persians and Romans with regards to nomadic peoples on their fringes, as will be discussed later.[17]

The Mari letters indicate that nomads in this sector of the frontier between Syria and Babylon underwent a census, on the basis of which they were apportioned for military and labor service, and their leaders made responsible for the conduct of their people while in the settled zone. The letter also mentioned nomads such as the Sutians who were further away and hence less subject to official control. These people are referred to in a more negative light, and often accused of crimes such as robbery and murder.[18]

Similarly, official Babylonian texts show a wide range of interaction with the Amorites. On the one hand, Amorites attained high status in Babylonian society/government, such as generalship. On the other hand, during the reigns of Shulgi and Shu-Sin, a wall was built to keep

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[14] Van de Mieroop (2004), 89.

[15] See M.I. Finley, *The Ancient Economy,* Second Edition (Berkeley, 1973).

[16] Van de Mieroop (2004), 88.

[17] See also P. Khoury, J. Kostiner, eds., *Tribes and State Formation in the Middle East* (Berkeley, 1990).

[18] Van de Mieroop (2004), 88. See also A. Khazanov, *Nomads and the outside world* (Madison, 1994).

the Amorites out. Some dynasties proudly claimed Amorite descent, and even Hammurabi himself used the title "King of the Amorites." Thus, there was no stigma attached to being Amorite by birth, yet at the same time, contemporary documents often depict Amorite activities in a negative light. Such remarks undoubtedly indicate an actual and significant threat from the nomads. They may also in part indicate a level of mistrust and prejudice between settled and nomadic peoples, by virtue of their differences and as a factor of life beyond their control.[19] Again, this resonates with later Roman attitudes towards nomads.

The Aramaeans and Strengthening Nomadic Influence

Documentation for the events of Neo-Bablylonian period from 1100 to 900 B.C.E. is scarce due to the decline of stable bureaucracy and its attendant record keeping. However, the resulting power vacuum gave the opportunity for semi-nomadic pastoralists to usher in another phase of large-scale change in the Near East. Aramaeans from northern Syria began migrating across the Near East, supplanting or merging into what was left of the power structures of the succeeding age.[20] In areas such as Assyria and Babylonia, these peoples largely adapted to the prevailing cultures, with the exception of their language Aramaic, which would gradually come into common use throughout the Near East. Many high-positions within the ranks of these empires began to be filled by Aramaeans as well.[21]

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[19] Van de Mieroop (2004), 88-89. See also A.T. Smith, *The Political Landscape: Constellations of Authority in Early Complex Polities* (Los Angeles, 2003).

[20] Van de Mieroop (2004), 204. See also P.E. Dion, *Les Araméens à l'age du fere: histoire politique et structures sociales* (Paris, 1997).

[21] Van de Mieroop (2004), 205-206.

Joining the Aramaeans in competition for control of Babylonia were the Kassites, Elamites and a new people, the Chaldeans from the East. Interestingly for this project, Arab peoples migrated from the South into the region of Babylonia. This development was driven by the domestication of the camel in the later second millennium, itself a development of the overland incense trade to the Near East. Camels changed nomadic culture because they allowed nomads to travel over much greater distances, using oases for support, thus opening up areas further from watered zones near settlements. Nomadic peoples became part of the historical record at this time, when in settled areas they were drawn into the population as warriors, much like the Maru mentioned above. Those further into the desert or on its fringes, and thus independent of settled powers, were often accounted as enemies.[22] This follows a familiar pattern of interaction between the settled and desert zones throughout the ancient and modern worlds. Aramaic, the language of these nomads, would become the forerunner of Arabic, around which a new paradigmatic culture would form throughout the Middle East, lasting into present times.

The Waning of Hellenistic Rule

Aramaean culture would survive the rise and fall of ever the greater empires of the Persians, Alexander and the successor kingdoms of the Hellenistic age by virtue of these powers' shared policy of allowing local cultural and political autonomy under the guide of their administrations. Hence a sort of veneer of imperial control and culture over the strata of local cultural identity developed, which itself was not always completely untouched by the cultural

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[22] Van de Mieroop (2004), 206. See also J. Retso, *The Arabs in Antiquity: Their History from the Assyrians to the Ummayyads* (London, 2003). and P.K. Hitti, *History of the Arabs from the Earliest Times to the Present* (London, 1970).

influences of their overlords. Thus, as Seleucid power aged, its centralizing influence declined in favor of growing local autonomy. Greek enculturation of the local had only ever been a suggestion, and not the rule.[23] Indeed, although some land ownership shifted to the Greeks, new settlers had as much to learn and adopt from the native people as the native did from them.[24] After the death of Antiochus IV in 164 B.C.E., there was an acceleration in the local autonomy of Judaea, Syria, the coastal states and among the nomadic peoples of the unsettled zone.[25] In turn, many of these peoples began to look outward to other major powers such as Rome and eventually Parthia to fill the power vacuum left by the decline and infighting of the Seleucid royal house.[26]

Roman Relations Along the Frontier in the Republic and Early Empire

During the period of Seleucid decline, much of the Syrian territory furthest from the urban centers of power began to fragment and fall under the control of various local powers.[27] Besides a significant increase in piracy on the seas, nomads began to seize control of large parts

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[23] M. Sartre, *The Middle East Under Rome* (Cambridge, MA, 2005), 7.

[24] Sartre (2005), 10. See also F. Millar, *The Roman Near East, 31 BC-AD 337* (Cambridge, MA, 1993).

[25] Sartre (2005), 11. See also D. Kennedy, "Greek, Roman and Native Cultures in the Roman Near East." in J.H. Humphrey, ed., *The Roman and Byzantine Near East*, Vol. 2, JRS Supplementary Series 31 (Portsmouth, RI, 1999), 76-106.

[26] Sartre (2005), 25ff. The turning point came with Seleucid overtures for support from Tigranes of Armenia in the 80's B.C.E. Tigranes had noted connections with the Parthians to the east, and he wasted no time in occupying Seleucia, which he held until pushed out by the Romans in 69 during the course of the Mithridatic Wars. This left Rome in de facto possession of Seleucia with all of the responsibilities that entailed and setting Rome on course to the eventual conquest of the entire Near East up to bounds of the Parthian Empire.

[27] Sartre (2005), 32ff. See also W.F. Lancaster, "Thoughts on the Bedouinization of Arabia," *Proceedings of the Seminar for Arab Studies* 18 (1988), 51-62.

of the desert frontiers.[28] Strabo mentions the eastern boundary of of Syria being the west bank of

the Euphrates and the (territory of) the Scenitae nomads, the word *scenitae* meaning "tent

dwellers."[29] Further, he mentions nomadic peoples along the areas at the fringes of the settled

zone who threatened its security, particularly the towns along the edge of the desert which were

involved in the caravan trade, such as Calchis.[30] Further south towards Damascus, Strabo credits

the peoples of the nearby deserts as a threat to the caravan trade from Arabia Felix (far southern

Arabia).[31] Throughout the passages cited above, Strabo credits Pompey with eliminating these

nomadic threats and reestablishing security as he occupied the Near East. Further, Pompey

focused on the settled areas and its city-states as the primary units of his provincial

organization.[32] However, for areas on the margins, he resorted to the practice of client-

kingship.[33]

We know of one named nomadic leader who received such status, Ptolemy of the

Ituraean dynasty, seated in the region of the Beqaa Valley of Lebanon, and thus a settled rather

than nomadic zone.[34] This is one example of a nomads who became settled, or at least semi-

settled along the transitional zone between the cultivated and uncultivated desert. And when

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[28] Strabo, *Geographica*, 16.2. See Strabo, *Geographica*, trans. H.L. Jones (Cambridge, MA, 1917-32); Sartre, (2005).

[29] Strabo, 16.2.11, 15.

[30] Strabo, 16.2.15. See also M. Rostoftzeff, *Caravan Cities* (Oxford, 1932).

[31] Strabo, 16.2.20.

[32] Sartre (2005), 43. See also H.I. MacAdam, *Geography, Urbanization and Settlement Patterns in the Roman Near East* (Aldershot, 2002).

[33] Sartre (2005), 43.

[34] Sartre (2005), 43; Josephus, *De antiquitate judaico*, trans. L.H. Feldman (Cambridge, MA, 1930-65).

texts such as Strabo and others mention conflict between locals of the zone and Rome, it doesn't

necessarily mean with actively nomadic peoples per se.[35] Indeed, although there is much mention

of "bandits" and fighting with "Arabs" in the texts, there is little evidence at all that Rome

conflicted with nomadic peoples on the fringes of the Syrian province during this period. This is

true also for the client kingdoms further south, such as Judaea, where there is similar mention of

"raiders," but there is no way to know who they were or where they were from.[36] Other fringe

states such as Palmyra, remained independent, and as will be discussed below, maintained their

own relations with the nomadic peoples, which were in the vein of cooperation and alliance

rather than conflict.[37] This tension between the nomad and the settled peoples, and the fact that it

ebbed when centralized power was weak, such as during the civil wars, and waned when it was

strong, resonate with earlier references to such interaction cited above and those during the

course of the Persian and Roman into Late Antiquity and beyond.[38]

The Early Imperial Period

The formal expansion of Roman power in the East would be come during the empire

proper. Although Augustus successfully consolidated the empire which he inherited, his

conservative leadership style focused more on maintaining rather than expanding the frontiers.[39]

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[35] Sartre (2005), 69.

[36] Sartre (2005), 69.

[37] Sartre (2005), 43-44. See J. Szuchman, "Integrating Approaches to Nomads, Tribes, and the State in the Ancient Near East," in J. Szuchman, ed., *Nomads, Tribes and the State in the Ancient Near East: Cross Disciplinary Perspectives* (Chicago, 2008), 1-14.

[38] Sartre (2005), 45ff.

[39] One exception to this policy was upper Germany, where a succession of Roman campaigns pushed the frontier to the Elbe River by 16 B.C. A major Roman defeat at the Battle of the Teutoburg Forest in 9 C.E.

In the east, Roman interests were served almost as a rule through client kingdoms during this period, with the accepted boundary between Rome and Parthia at the middle Euphrates.[40] The nominal southern limit of the frontier extended to the area of Palmyra, though no formal military roads existed at this point, and the further south one went, the more tenuous Roman control became.[41] As a province of Caesar (one in which standing legions were garrisoned), three legions were based in Syria at this time.[42] Civil staff was limited only to an equestrian *procurator* in charge of taxation and payment of the troops.[43] Thus, the main responsibilities of civil administration remained on the shoulders of the client rulers, as before. This situation would remain so until the end of the Julio-Claudian period. Indeed, from the accession of Gaius until the Jewish Wars, even more responsibility was handed to client rulers than in earlier phases of Roman occupation.[44] All of this would change with the full-scale popular uprising in Judaea.

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brought an end to Roman expansion further northward. To the east, Roman campaigns pushed the frontier to the Danube River by 29 C.E. See M. Cary and H.H. Scullard, *A History of Rome: Down to the Reign of Constantine* (Boston, 1976), 336-38.

[40] Strabo, *Geographica*, 16.1.28: "The Euphrates and the land beyond it constitute the boundary of the Parthian empire. But the parts this side of the river are held by the Romans and the chieftains (*phylarchoi*) of the Arabians as far as Babylonia, some of these chieftains preferring to give ear to the Parthians and others to the Romans." See F. Millar, *The Roman Near East, 31 BC-AD 337* (Cambridge, MA, 1993), 29-30.

[41] A boundary marker at Khirbet el-Bilaas states the *regio Palmyrena* was established under Creticus Silanus, *legatus* of Syria in 11-17 C.E. Finally, there is a dedication to Tiberius, Drusus and Germanicus by the *legatus* of the X Fretensis in a temple of Bel in the region of Palmyra. See H. Seyrig, "L'incorporation de Palmyre à l'empire romain," *Syria* 13 (1932), 266.

[42] Josephus, *De bello judaico*, 2.3.1, 5.1. See Josephus, *De bello judaico*, trans. H. St. J. Thackeray (Cambridge, MA, 1927-28). See also F. Millar (1993), 31-32 and J. Wagner, *Die Römer an Euphrat und Tigris* (Sondernummer, 1985), 26.

[43] Millar (1993), 32.

[44] Millar (1993), 56 ff.

The Flavian period witnessed the final destruction of the Jewish state under the Emperors

Vespasian and Titus at the end of the First Jewish-Roman War (66-73).[45] The Flavian period

was a crucial turning point in that it set the precedent for an emperor coming from the provinces,

rather than from Italy. In this way the provinces were maturing, and whereas in the past they had

been used by Italian emperors to increase their power in Rome, they could now exercise power

over Rome itself by producing the armies and generals who would dominate the throne. The

complete absorption of Judaea under the Flavians also set the precedent for more direct control

of the provinces in the east, since from the time of the Republic, Rome had seemed hesitant to

move beyond client-state forms of rule in the region. After the institution of Judaea as a full

praetorian province with a permanent legion in garrison, the next step was the stationing of two

new legions in Cappadocia.[46] Commagene itself was absorbed into the province of Syria proper

and its client kingship dissolved.[47] Further, the first evidence of Roman military road

construction appears along the west bank of the Euphrates.[48] Roman influence extended as far as

Palmyra is indicated by traces of a Roman road in the direction of Oresa at the confluence of the

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[45] M. Carey, H.H. Scullard, *A History of Rome,* Third Edition (New York, 1988), 415 ff.

[46] Suetonius, *De Vita Caesarum*, 8; Tacitus, *Historiae,* 2.81. The legions were the XVI Flavia at Satala and the XII Fulminata at Melitene. See also Josephus, *De bello iudaico*, 7.1.3.

[47] Millar (1993), 80.

[48] Evidenced by a Latin inscription dating to the reign of Vespasian on the ruins of the first Roman bridge across the Chabinas River, *Les Inscriptions greques et latines de la Syrie*, 1.38. See *Les Inscriptions greques et latines de la Syrie*, R. Jalabert, R. Mouterde, eds. (Beirut, 1929-82). Further, traces of fort construction which may date to the Flavian period exist along the banks of the Euphrates suggesting a formal defensive line here. See J.G. Crow, D.H. French, "New Research on the Euphrates Frontier," in W.S. Hanson, L.J.F. Keppie, eds., *Roman Frontier Studies 1979* III (1980), 903. See also D.H. French, J. Moore, H.F. Russell, "Excavations at Tille, 1979-1982," *Anatolian Studies* 32 (1982), 161; Millar (1993), 83.

Euphrates and Balikh rivers.[49] Sometime in the 70's the client kingdom of Emesa seems to have been absorbed as well.[50]

The final and greatest era of expansion coincided with the reign of the Emperor Trajan (r. 98-117), who spent his entire career in a series of field campaigns on the frontiers. Trajan's campaign against the Parthians from 111 to his death in 117 subdued all of Mesopotamia up to east bank of the Tigris River and the mouth of the Persian Gulf, which areas became the provinces of Armenia, Mesopotamia and Assyria.[51] Trajan promoted Nabataea (Jordan) from client to provincial status in 106.[52] Because the former Nabataean realm was too large to be a single province, the northern half was organized as a new province of Arabia by 115.[53] The site of the capital of *Arabia* is debated. Certainly, the legionary base was at Bostra, but the administrative functions seemed to be centered more on Gerasa, as evidenced by a predominance of procuratorial inscriptions there.[54] This development follows the consolidation of Judaea discussed above and signifies the growing importance of the region to imperial policy.

The Severan Period: The Frontiers as Fulchrum Point

Following the unsuccessful reign of Marcus Aurelius's successor, Commodus, the empire fell into a less certain state which ranged from change and readjustment under the Severan

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[49] Evidenced by a milestone at Arak, erected in 75 C.E. by M. Ulpius Trajanus as *legatus*. *AE* (1933), no. 205. See also G.W. Bowersock, "Syria under Vespasian," *JRS* 63 (1973), 133; M. Gawlikowski, "Palmyre et l'Euphrate," *Syria* 60 (1983), 53; Millar (1993), 83.

[50] Millar (1993), 84.

[51] Carey (1988), 438-39.

[52] Sartre (2005), 133ff.

[53] Sartre (2005), 133.

[54] Sartre (2005), 134.

dynasty to all out civil war under the many imperial pretenders of the third century. For the

frontiers, all of this meant crisis and fluctuation, as the internal troubles of the empire gave notice

to the uneasy among Rome's subjects that the government and army was distracted and the time

for revolt ripe. From the Rhine and Danube to Palmyra in the east, rebellions flared.

The Severan and following periods well illustrate how the frontiers, especially the most

active militarily, had become the center of gravity for the empire as a whole. Never before had

the power of the emperor been more connected with the frontier armies. Indeed, the connection

between the frontier and the armies was a potential liability as well, because these armies could

be used by their commanders against the emperor himself. To counter this, beginning in the

second century, there was a growing trend towards dividing the provinces into smaller units to

limit the number of troops under a single provincial commander. Such was the case with

Nabataea and Arabia mentioned above.

Septimius Severus continued the trend in the second century by dividing Syria into Syria

Phoenice (coastal) and Coele-Syria (central rift valley).[55] Caracalla's granting of universal

citizenship to the provinces underscored their new importance.[56] That power could derive

independently from discrete regions of the frontiers is exemplified by cases such as the imperial

pretender Philip the Arab, who, after consolidating his power in Syria, campaigned successfully

against the Germans and Dacians along the Danube, came to good terms with the Senate in

Rome and lived to celebrate its millenary in 248. Some, such as Zenobia's revolt took the

character of an empire within an empire, as the enemies of yesterday became the allies of the

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[55] W. Ball, *Rome in the East: The Transformation of an Empire* (London, 2000), 18.

[56] The *Constituto Antoniniana* of 212. See Carey (1988), 500.

moment.[57] However, by the end of the period the emperor Aurelian had managed to reel in these revolts and restore the frontiers nearly to their previous status.[58] In the future, much would hinge on controlling the frontiers, and subsequent emperors would pay more and more attention to the east as a center of imperial power.

The Frontier in Late Antiquity

Perhaps the most important event of the third century for the future of the Near East was the replacement of the Parthian dynasty of Persia with a new, more dedicated and energized superpower, the Sasanians, who defeated the last Parthian king, Artabanus V in 224. This empire would last 430 years and become a formidable counterbalance to the power of Rome in the east throughout Late Antiquity. The real strength of the Sasanians, or New Persians, was their Zoroastrian religious fervor and ambitions to restore the ancient glory of the Persians to its former apex achieved during the Old Persian Empire of Cyrus the Great. This meant ridding the Near East of the Romans, which a succession of Sasanian kings from Ardeshir to Shapur I wasted no time in doing, first defeating the standing emperor Alexander Severus, followed by Gordian III and his army in 244. Shapur then turned to Syria whose capital Antioch was twice sacked, in 256 and 260. Interestingly, these Syrian campaigns seemed to be met with praise by the native Syrians, who apparently proclaimed the Persians as liberators. Finally, after a crushing defeat which saw 60,000 Roman soldiers led away as prisoners of war, the new emperor Valerian himself was imprisoned as a servant of the Persian king for the rest of his life. This

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[57] Carey (1988), 508 ff.

[58] Carey (1988), 513-16. See also M. Sartre, *D'Alexandre a Zenobi: Histoire Levant antique IVe siecle av. J.C. - IIIe siecle ap. J.C.*, Revised Edition, (Paris, 2003).

would be the low-point in Rome's struggle with New Persia, as the Roman emperor Aurelian was able to rally the client kingdoms of the east and throw back the Persians by 272.[59]

Conflict between Rome and Persia

Aurelian's success was followed by the short-term restoration of Mesopotamia under the emperor Carus and his son Numerianus, who were both killed in the campaign. A new Persian king, Narseh then defeated the new emperor Galerius and once again expelled the Romans from Mesopotamia. A longer-term solution came in the form of the emperor Diocletian's comprehensive reforms of the imperial administration and military, which events are often credited with being the beginning of the late antique era. As a part of his reorganization of the east, Diocletian dealt with the Persian conflict by negotiating a "Forty-Year Peace" with them in 298.[60] This period also saw a vast new defensive building program across the breadth of the eastern frontier, perhaps as an insurance policy for the Persian peace, and because the Goths were becoming a more significant threat in other sectors of the empire, and he wanted to transfer more resources and attentions there instead of in holding the eastern frontier.

The succeeding era saw both a new Roman emperor, Constantine, and a new Persian king, Shapur II, come to power. Both were determined men, and Constantine had a strong vested interest in the east, particularly because he built a new Roman capital of Constantinople there. Constantine planned a full-fledged invasion of Persia but was unable to accomplish this before his death in 337. Up to this, there was little action along the eastern frontier, as Diocletian's

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[59] Ball (2000), 22-23.

[60] Ball (2000), 23. On the Roman/Persian conflict see also B. Dignas and E. Winter, *Rome and Persia in Late Antiquity: Neighbours and Rivals* (Cambridge, 2007).

peace held and Constantine relied on alliances with client kings along the frontier to secure the borders. His successor Constantius traded blows with the Persians with little progress either way, until Shapur broke the stalemate with an invasion in 359, the end of which witnessed the fall of Amida and the loss of much of the eastern frontier along the Euphrates.[61]

Rome's next attempt to subdue Persia came with the emperor Julian's ambitious invasion of Persia. The Persians fell back in an ordered retreat and scorched-earth strategy as the Romans advanced. Following a few victories, Julian was killed by a spear in combat and his successor Jovian made a thirty-year peace with Persia, under the condition that Rome surrender all gains across the Tigris River, a large part of Armenia and the important frontier city of Nisibis.[62]

Peace reigned between Rome and the Persians for most of the remainder of the fourth century through the fifth. This was largely because both powers had a new and dangerous enemy in the form of the Huns, and most of their efforts were spent trying to secure their northern frontiers against this threat. However, the early sixth century witnessed the outbreak of new large-scale conflicts between Rome and Persia under the emperor Justinian and Persian king Khusrau I. Despite a peace signed between the two in 532, conflicts continued on a small-scale, mostly by their surrogate Arab confederacies, the Lakhm and Ghassan. Finally, full-scale war broke out again in 540 when Khusrau invaded Rome with the accusation that Rome had encouraged the Huns to attack its borders. There was little resistance to his invasion at first. Indeed, it was aided by Roman army desertions along the frontiers and native sympathy for the Persians. The invasion captured Antioch and marched all the way to the sea before the Persians

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[61] Ball (2000), 24. For Shapur and the Sassanids see also R.N. Frye, "The Political History of Iran Under the Sassanids," *Cambridge History of Iran*, Vol. 3, Parts I & II (Cambridge, 1983).

[62] Ball (2000), 25.

were repulsed by the Roman general Belisarius all the way to Nisibis but failing to take the city before being recalled to Constantinople in 543. Peace reigned until Justinian's successor Justin II broke it with an invasion of Persian in 575, which saw little gain on either side and ended in yet another peace in 576. The peace of 576 lasted only three years before another long-term war broke out between Rome and Persia lasting until peace in 591.[63]

The accession of the Persian Khusrau II in 603 brought the final and ultimately decisive conflict with Rome. Khusrau rapidly captured the entire Near East, capturing Egypt and then Jerusalem by 622 and finally pushing his armies up to the gates of Constantinople itself. However, the Roman emperor Heraclius was able to unify the factions of Rome against their common enemy by appealing to religious indignation over the sacking of the Holy Land. Thus, in perhaps the first holy war of Christianity, Heraclius not only repulsed the Persians from Roman territory but pursued them into Mesopotamia itself, and with the murder of Khusrau in 634, his successor Kavadh II made peace with the Romans. Nevertheless, within a few decades, the Roman Empire would undergo a holy invasion of its own in the form of Islam and the new Arab empire.[64]

Views on the Nature of Frontiers of the Roman Empire

At the beginning of imperial expansion during the Republic, the frontiers were simply wherever the most recent campaigns had ended.[65] There were no official fixed-frontiers because

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[63] Ball (2000), 26-27.

[64] Ball (2000), 28-29.

[65] D. Williams, *The Reach of Rome: A History of the Roman Imperial Frontier 1st - 5th Centuries* (New York, 1997).

the Romans had no standing armies and so focused on eliminating a particular threat, such as the Carthaginians, and placing a friendly client kingdom in power before they went home and disbanded until the next campaign arose.

This policy and the nature of the frontiers began to change with Augustus, who spread the legions out along the far reaches of the empire where they were (1) far from Rome and under his own legal control as *imperator* (2) stationed where the threat of rebellion and external enemies was the greatest. Hence, part of the motivation for fixed fortified frontiers was political.[66] The third century Roman historian *Cassius Dio* remarked of Augustus's policies, ". . . he made haste, before they gave the least sign of an uprising, to discharge some entirely from the service and to scatter the majority of the others."[67] Further, on the character of the provinces Augustus controlled, *Dio* notes,

> He retained the more powerful, alleging that they were insecure and precarious and either had enemies on their borders or were able on their own account to begin a serious revolt. (3) His professed motive in this was that the senate might fearlessly enjoy the finest portion of the empire, while he himself had the hardships and the dangers; but his real purpose was that by this arrangement the senators will be unarmed and unprepared for battle, while he alone had arms and maintained soldiers. (4) Africa, Numidia, Asia, Greece with Epirus, the Dalmatian and Macedonian districts, Sicily, Crete and the Cyrenaic portion of Libya, Bithynia with Pontus which adjoined it, Sardinia and Baetica were held to belong to the people and the senate; (5) while to Caesar belonged the remainder of Spain, — that is, the district of Tarraco and Lusitania, — and all the Gauls, — that is, Gallia Narbonensis, Gallia Lugdunensis, Aquitania, and Belgica, both the natives themselves and the aliens among them. (6) For some of the Celts, whom we call Germans, had occupied all the Belgic territory along the Rhine and caused it to be called Germany, the upper portion extending to the sources of that river, and the lower portion reaching to the British Ocean. (7) These provinces, then, together with Coele-Syria, as it is called, Phoenicia, Cilicia, Cyprus and Egypt, fell at that time to Caesar's share; for

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[66] Williams (1997), 3.

[67] Cassius Dio, *Historia Romana*, 51.3.2. See Cassius Dio, *Historia Romana,* trans. E. Cary, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA, 1914-27).

afterwards he gave Cyprus and Gallia Narbonensis back to the people, and for himself took Dalmatia instead.[68]

For the next two centuries this would remain the precedent for the disposition of frontier forces, up to Constantine and his immediate predecessors who developed the concept of a central mobile force under the direct command of the emperor, which could be moved around the empire wherever required. This in turn was supplemented by the long-established practice of settling army veterans on frontier lands, both for their own economy and to serve as a permanent defensive line.[69]

In 9 C.E. Augustus's armies on the Rhine River suffered a disastrous setback when three legions and their commander Varus were wiped out by Germans at the battle of the Teutoberg forest.[70] This event spurred Augustus to take a more conservative and cautious approach to frontier expansion, which is reflected in his advice to his successors at his death in 19,"*consilium coercendi intra terminus imperii,"*or, "his counsel was to keep within the boundaries of the empire."[71] This was later echoed by Cassius Dio,

> He [Augustus] advised them to be satisfied with their present possessions and under no conditions to wish to increase the empire to any greater dimensions. It would be hard to guard, he said, and this would lead to danger of their losing what was already theirs. (6) This principle he had really always followed himself not only in speech but also in action; at any rate he might have made great acquisitions from the barbarian world, but he had not wished to do so.[72]

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[68] Cassius Dio, *Historia Romana*, 53.2-7.

[69] The terms for these units were *comitatenses* for the mobile armies and *limitanei* for the veteran frontier garrisons. See chapter 2 on military fortifications and defenses for sources and further discussion.

[70] Williams (1997), 6.

[71] Tacitus, *Annales*, 1.11. See Tacitus, *Annales*, trans. C. Moore, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA, 1925).

[72] Cassius Dio, *Historia Romana*, 56.33.5-6.

With the exception of a series of lackluster and exhausting campaigns under Augustus's successor Tiberius, the Rhine and Danube rivers would become first the *de facto* and then the official garrisoned frontiers of Rome in continental Europe for the next fifty years.[73]

Thus, the Romans understood that there were practical physical limits to the frontiers. Mountain ranges, deserts, seas, rivers, etc. marked natural ending places for the extension of control and "civilization." For the Romans this seemed more a case of whether they chose to control those places and at what cost. If the prize wasn't great enough, then why go to the effort? Thus, when the Roman commander Germanicus asked Tiberius for more resources to pursue the German campaign, the emperor counseled him "to return for the triumph decreed him: there had been already enough successes, and enough mischances."[74] These physical limits to expansion didn't really come into play until the empire began to reach these natural boundaries in the early empire.

Williams notes that rivers not only made practical military boundaries, but also carried some significance as sacred boundaries for the Romans. The use of *termini* figurines on bridges marked an ancient connection between Terminus, the god of boundaries and running water, and the Tiber river itself symbolized the division of the tribes of Rome from prehistoric times. Then of course the Rubicon river marked the northern boundary of the Roman homeland of Italy. The Rhine, Danube in the west and the Euphrates in the east were broad enough to make effective defensive lines. Rivers of this size created a sufficient buffer against the range of artillery, required substantial engineering skills and expertise to bridge, slowed the enemy down enough to

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[73] Williams (1997), 8-9.

[74] Tacitus, *Annales*, 2.26.

rally defenses in the case of a crossing by boat, and provided a water supply for garrisons along their length.[75] The rivers also stretched considerable distances across Europe and the Near East. Of a similar nature to the river frontiers were the seas and oceans, such as the Mediterranean, Atlantic, Black Sea, etc. These boundaries were quite permeable and their defenses were in the form of naval fleets which regulated and policed traffic, rather than repelling it.

Mountain ranges formed the natural frontiers of the empire in some sectors. The first, established by Vespasian in the first century, formed the eastern frontier of Cappadocia (Asia Minor), extending down to the Euphrates River. This line consisted of three mountain ranges, each running east/west, the Pontic, the Anti-Taurus and the Kurdish-Taurus.[76] The Euphrates River has its source near Erzurum in the trough between the Pontic and Anti-Taurus, where it flows westward between them before heading south towards Mesopotamia. The southerly stretch through the mountains runs through precipitous and impassable gorges. Thus, the combination of the mountains and the Euphrates together create the most secure natural frontier of the Roman empire. The other mountain frontier was the northern line of Dacia, where the Carpathian Mountains surround Transylvania and provide a relatively secure defense for the new province, so much so that Hadrian retained this part of Trajan's new conquests. The downside to these mountain frontiers is that the rugged nature of the terrain worked against the defenders as much as those it was defending against. High altitude conditions were harsh, difficult to garrison and supply, and peoples inhabited the ranges who were as intractable as the peaks and knew the

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[75] Williams (1997), 9. See also W.S. Hanson, "The Nature and Function of Roman Frontiers," in *Barbarians and Romans in North-west Europe: From the Later Republic to Late Antiquity*, J.C. Barrett, A.P. Fitzpatrick, and L. Macinnes, eds., BAR International Series 471 (Oxford, 1989).

[76] Williams (1997), 25, 30.

terrain and how to operate in it better than Romans ever would.[77] Finally, as Hannibal had

proved in the Alps before, invading armies could and did cross formidable mountains.

The next major natural defense was the deserts of the near eastern, and African frontiers.

One might also count the heaths of upper Scotland in this group as well. These were also perhaps

the least easy to defend, because in all cases they relied on the elements and a road network

connecting a series of watchtowers and fortresses.[78] As we will explore further in this study for

Arabia, this type of frontier infrastructure also performed a regulatory function for traffic across

the frontier in times of peace.[79] This point underscores perhaps the most important thing about

these frontiers, they were in the midst of peoples who were relatively independent, who knew

and were well adapted to the physical conditions, and who were thus not easy to control.

Though physical frontiers were practical limits, sometimes emperors chose to disregard

them for other reasons, the most popular of which were politics and propaganda. For example,

Claudius had no other strategic reason for crossing the channel to invade Britain, or to campaign

above the Rhine, other than to establish his military credentials. Similarly, Julian had delusions

of becoming a new Alexander when he decided to invade Persia wholesale, and greatly

shortened his life in the process. Sometimes glory was combined with a demand for resources,

cash or otherwise. An example of this is Trajan's invasion across the Danube into Dacia, whose

goldfields were a tempting target.[80] Trajan went on to campaign past the Euphrates, even though,

again, there was no truly rational reason to do so other than conquest for the sake of conquest.

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[77] Williams (1997), 25, 59.

[78] Williams (1997), 59. See also E.F. Gautier, *Le Passe de l'Afrique du Nord* (Paris,1952).

[79] Williams (1997), 61.

[80] Williams (1997), 13, 56.

Ultimately the singular fact remained that, as Williams states, ". . . no propaganda points would be scored by digging ditches, manning watchtowers, or hiding behind rivers."[81] Augustus's counsel again resonated when, after Trajan's death, some of his advances proved too difficult and costly to hold, prompting his successor Hadrian to withdraw back to previous natural boundaries.

Hence ancient views and policies on frontiers seemed to be preoccupied with their military/political character and this has followed into the conventional school of modern thought as well, exemplified by such authors as Hanson and Luttwak, who see the frontiers in exclusively military terms.[82] As Hanson states, "Roman frontiers are undeniably military in character; they were built and operated by the army and housed the troops who defended the empire against external threats."[83] This one-sided view of the frontiers is perhaps no surprise when one considers the influence modern imperialism has had on the concept of frontiers and traditional historiographic views of the Roman Empire.

The Influence of Imperialism on Historiography

The Romans' imperial perspective on what was inside versus outside the frontiers was in turn inherited and built upon by later European imperialists, who were themselves studying and looking back to the Romans for their models and rationalization. In short, modern historiography of the Roman Empire has itself been influenced greatly by later imperialism. As Whittaker

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[81] Williams (1997), 54.

[82] W.S. Hanson (1989); E.N. Luttwak, *The Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire from the First Century A.D. to the third* (Baltimore, 1976).

[83] Hanson (1989), 58.

observed, "To understand the historiography of frontiers, therefore, we must have some awareness of the influence of imperialism on British writing. . . To them frontiers were simply the dividing line between the civilized and the barbarian. A sophisticated theory did not exist."[84]

The British statesman, Lord Curzon, himself remarked that although the majority of international treaties are concerned with frontiers, "you may ransack the catalogues of libraries, you may study the writings of scholars, and you will find the subject is almost wholly ignored."[85] The ancient Roman frontier was often referenced in discussions of later frontiers, such as in C.C. Davies study of the Indian frontier, where the author states, "Rome fell because her dykes were not strong enough to hold back the flood of barbarian inroads."[86]

British imperialist views of frontiers and Roman history had their counterparts in other European imperial perspectives. The French scholar of the Roman frontier in Africa, E.F. Gautier, noted that the lines of the frontier there could be traced with precision based on the modern line of civilization, beyond which was "un autre monde," in stark contrast by virtue of its barbarian nomads "lack of order and development."[87] German concepts of political and anthropological geography, exemplified by the work of Friedrich Ratzel, gave voice to the concept of Lebensraum and the frontier as a product of cultural parameters and Darwinian forces. That is to say, the physical environment in which a people lived shaped both them and their culture.[88]

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[84] C.R. Whittaker, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire: A Social and Economic Study* (Baltimore and London, 1994), 2.

[85] Lord Curzon, "Frontiers," Romanes Lecture. Oxford. (1907).

[86] C.C. Davies, *The Problem of the North West Frontier, 1890-1908,* Reprint (Oxford, 1932,1975).

[87] E.F. Gautier, *Le Passe de l'Afrique du Nord* (Paris, 1952), 211-12.

[88] F. Ratzel, *Anthropo-Geographie* (Stuttgart, 1882); F. Ratzel, *Politische Geographie* (Stuttgart, 1897).

Paul MacKendrick applied Frederick Turner's classic theory of the American frontier's shaping of the identity to Roman colonization,[89] The "conquering" of the "uncivilized" and "taming" of the "wild," Manifest Destiny and the idea of "founding fathers" are all aspects which the Roman and American perspectives share. A certain propaganda was constructed on both sides to explain the forging of the state and the identity in the face of the other. Ammianus' comparison of the Saracens to kites rapaciously victimizing the settled inhabitants of the frontier is the "wild" which must be tamed as the Romans penetrate the wilderness.[90]

Frederick Turner's paper, though open to legitimate criticisms by today's standards, was the first true modern historiographic attempt to view the concept of frontiers as a dynamic beyond the technical and seemingly self-evident notion of a mere linear limit between two distinct and perhaps unique territorial zones. For this reason, Turner's model bears close examination as one from which tools might be borrowed for a study of the Roman frontier. Certainly, Turner's conception of the frontier is founded on assumptions of the linear and binary, but he uses this physical binary to define a mental and emotional process of development among Europeans who came into contact with the frontier zone and were shaped by it. The end result was that the "European" identity became the "American" identity. Hence, Turner's mechanism of shifting identity is essentially an application of evolutionary theory and fits very well into its 19th century intellectual roots.

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[89] P.L. MacKendrick, "Roman Colonization and the Frontier Hypothesis," in *The Frontier in Perspective,* W.D. Wyman and C.B. Kroeber, eds., (Madison, 1965), 3-20. Cato and the Scipios become Thomas Jefferson and George Washington. See also F. J. Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," *Annual Report of the American Historical Association* (1894), 197-228.

[90] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res gestae,* 14.4.1. See Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res gestae*, ed. and trans. J.C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA, 1935-39).

However, as an evolutionary theory, Turner's thesis is limited by the assumptions of the scientific genre. That is, the theory of evolution assumes a set of natural and material circumstances which are very specific to the time and geographic space in question. These specific parameters exercise specific and unique forces on the subjects which come into contact with and inhabit the zone. So, just as Darwin's Galapagos finches each developed into a unique species under the special forces of their isolated island environments, so Europeans evolved into their new "American" form under the special forces which the American frontier environment placed on them. For this reason, Turner's method is in a sense a product of and limited to the specific type of frontier which the American west presents. If each frontier is in a sense a unique set of circumstances, then each requires a specially tailored theoretical construct to analyze its dynamics. The portability of Turner's method *in toto*, is hence limited to its own time and space, or to other times and spaces which are analogous to the American west of the period of expansion. It is a special construct for a set of assumptions which Turner identifies and defines for his work. Caution must be exercised in applying it broadly to other historical frames of reference without qualification.

An analysis of the basic characteristics of Turner's frontier illustrate this. This frontier is one which assumes and projects a binary juncture between the "civilized" and "wilderness." Turner's frontier is the meeting place between savagery and civilization.[91] It also assumes a binary of "Old World" societal characteristics versus those of the "New." Turner defines his frontier scientifically as a line which marks the break between the unsettled and settled. These are numbers which Turner can actually enumerate based on the U.S. Census, whose reports

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[91] Turner (1894), 201.

inspire his work.[92] The focus on a population break across "unsettled" and "free" frontier means that Turner also doesn't factor in the dynamic of urbanization and how this might also exercise an "evolutionary" force on Americanism. Turner's frontier must also be an expanding one. The further west it expands, the more pronounced the evolutionary effect, i.e. the more "American" individuals become. When the frontier can no longer expand, the process ends, according to Turner.[93] This suggests that another frontier to expand into is required, i.e. overseas. Turner's frontier dynamic is an imperial one, and so is akin to studies of colonial frontiers. Such an expansionist view of the frontier thus falls into the imperialistic tradition of Ratzel's strong over weak, Lebensraum and Manifest Destiny.

Such a view of the frontiers is particularly tempting when the subject of static fortifications arises. That there was military opposition along the frontiers is a given, but to overemphasize such an interpretation of the frontier as a military phenomenon is again to oversimplify a complex situation. An important objective of this study is to decenter the military aspect of the frontier and look beyond it to interaction and indeed the military as an actor in the cross-cultural nature of the frontier zone. Certain aspects of the Turner thesis are useful in studying parts of the Roman frontiers. Chief among these is its ability to explore questions of identity across a frontier space. Not all frontier spaces are by their nature suitable for this application. For example, a large sector of the late Roman imperial frontier in the east displays a pattern of long-developed urbanization and civilization. The Romans were expanding into a zone which was perhaps more "civilized" (by European standards) than their own. It had been hellenized before the Romans and before being hellenized it was shaped by millennia of

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[92] Turner (1894), 199.

[93] Turner (1894), 200.

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civilizations and empires. The Romans inherit this and step into the role of their forebearers there. This is shown by the fact that the Romans view the Persians, who control the other side of this frontier "line," as equals for the most part, rarely applying the term "barbarian" to them, and treating with them superpower to superpower.

Areas of the Roman frontiers where there is perhaps scope for comparison are North Africa, and the subject of this study, Arabia, where the transitional desert zone is inhabited by largely independent nomadic peoples who control the "wilderness" as the native Americans controlled theirs. Even here the Romans seemed to have realized that the economy of projecting their power into this zone was little and dealt with the natives as allies more than people to be subjected. It was not an expanding zone.

Turner's views on identity could be applicable to examining how the Roman identity was shaped in apposition to the desert people, whom they refer to with generic terms such as the "tent-dwellers." The question of what constituted Roman versus "barbarian" offers the greatest promise for the application of Turner, in the parts of the empire where a pronounced melting-pot effect can be defined as the Romans came into contact with "barbarians" along an expanding frontier. However, "barbarians" expanded their frontier into the Roman sphere as well, and even used the Romans for their own devices at times. The case can be made that both sides fused into a new identity which combined the inhabitants of the frontier with the Roman, the product of which could be defined as a new identity. However, it is clear that the rather old-fashioned binary of the Turner theory can't tell the whole story here either. Both sides translated their own identities across the broad frontier zone. Both had agency. Questions of dominant or submissive identity roles are unclear. This zone speaks against a binary relationship and so is suited to a

more modern approach such as Mary Pratt's contact zone[94], which we will revisit later. One might see an analogy in the "civilized" versus "savage" or "settled" versus "unsettled" on the Roman frontier, but this would be to fall victim to the chauvinistic tendencies of Turner's thesis and nineteenth century historiography. In conclusion, Roman identity did shift on the frontier, and it is a shift which comes about through the unique forces of the frontier, but Turner's theory is perhaps not the best way to examine it.

It was left to Febvre and the Annales school to critique the evolution of the modern concept of frontier as the product of the rise of the nation-state and an instrument of imperialism.[95] As Febvre explores in his paper, "*Frontiere*, the word and concept," the first use of the term "frontier" was to refer to the facade of a building, or by extension a line of fortifications or walls. Thus, its core meaning is a physical and material boundary dividing within from without in a spatial and binary relationship. This basic sense of division or demarcation colors the applicability of this term when historians have attempted to apply it to more subtle or nuanced studies of relationships between polities, cultures, religions, or even geography. It demands continual qualification and specific definition because it continually carries the sense of division within its core. Thus, one must say things like cultural frontier, religious frontier, military frontier, natural frontier, intellectual frontier, etc. and then it still implies a binary relationship, where the author might actually be discussing a relationship of continuity or exchange.

Thus, the baggage of the frontier as a word and concept should perhaps be left strictly to the binary, if any such relationship actually exists, in favor of more nuanced terminology and

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[94] M. L. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York, 2007).

[95] L. Febvre, *La terre et l'evolution humaine* (Paris, 1922).

theoretical framework to discuss differences which are not actually a matter of black and white, which do not constitute walls, or assume impermeable barriers between positions. After all, even facades have doors and windows which communicate between inside and outside, and walls have gates and ports which link spaces. Such deconstruction of the "frontier" allows us to begin to strip away the "encrustation" (to borrow Febvre's figure) of the historiographic legacy, and to look back with the independence of perspective. Nevertheless, in the postcolonial age, Roman history is not without its holdouts, as evidenced by Alfoldi, who at mid-century could still say, "Not only a waterway . . . not only did a palisade isolate the [barbarians] . . . but the frontier line was at the same time a line of demarcation between two fundamentally different realms of thought."[96]

A further question which gets to heart of the concept of spatial frontiers is why do frontiers exist where they do? Categories of analysis include natural boundaries, limits of military strategic value, religious divides, cultural divides, etc. One consideration in answering this question in the west has been the modern conception of what constitutes the nation-state and more importantly the rationalization of its borders, which tended to be concrete and mathematical, and often arbitrary in its concerns for these categories of analysis. Febvre shows that this concept of the fixed frontier, where one can stand with one foot on one side and one on the other, is often projected onto the other eras, especially the ancient, claiming that, say, the Romans actually surveyed and secured their borders in such a systematic way.[97]

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[96] A. Alfoldi, "The Moral Frontier on the Rhine and Danube," Limeskongress I, (1952), 1-16.

[97] I.e. as Luttwak proclaims in his *Grand Strategy of the Roman Empire.*

On the eastern frontier per se, much of the credit for the heightened interest and research on the Roman frontiers of this region goes to G.W. Bowersock's seminal paper on the Roman province of Arabia.[98] This was followed in 1983 by Bowersock's *Roman Arabia* which reflected the fruits of his decade of research on the subject, laying out a foundation for later work in this sector.[99] Particularly important was Bowersock's call for more work on the archaeological sources for Arabia, which was answered in 1986 by S.T. Parker's thesis on the material culture of the Arabian defensive frontier, itself the foundation for an in depth archaeological survey of the *Strata Diocletiana* over the past three decades.[100]

By the 1990's the fruits of this trend in research on the eastern frontiers began to produce full-scale studies on the Roman east. Benjamin Isaac's *The Limits of Empire* was the first of these surveys to combine both the ancient literary sources with material culture for a deeper picture of traditional military/political frontier, though not going beyond this perspective.[101] F. Millar was the first to produce a new, more comprehensive study of the frontier, which began with the military frontier, but also extended into questions of communal and cultural identities and the concept of east versus west.[102] Millar's study represented a starting point for a social/cultural/economic study from both sides of the frontier, rather than just the Romanocentric

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[98] G.W. Bowersock, "A Report on Arabia Provincia." *JRS* 61 (1971), 219-42.

[99] G.W. Bowersock, *Roman Arabia* (Cambridge, MA, 1983).

[100] S.T. Parker, *Romans and Saracens: A History of the Arabian Frontier* (Winona Lake, IN, 1986); S.T. Parker, *The Roman Frontier in Central Jordan. Interim Report on the Limes Arabicus Project, 1980-85*, 2 vols., BAR Insititute Series 340, i-ii (Oxford, 1987); S.T. Parker, *The Roman Frontier in Central Jordan: Final Report on the Limes Arabicus Project, 1980- 89*, 2 vols. (Washington D.C., 2006).

[101] B. Isaac, *The Limits of Empire,* Revised Edition (Oxford, 1992).

[102] F. Millar (1993).

perspective. As Millar states, ". . . the book presents a map of surface appearances, of communal and cultural identities as seen and expressed by both insiders and outsiders."[103]

New Views of the Roman Frontiers

In 1994 Whittaker introduced a new theoretical model of the Roman frontiers which looked beyond the Greco-Roman veil of the frontiers, beginning with an assumption of connection rather than disconnection, and interaction rather than opposition across the intellectual and physical space of Arabia in Late Antiquity.[104] Whittaker utilizes an economic and ecological approach to analyzing frontier dynamics in the Roman east, which he describes as a "broad transitional region."[105]

Inspired by Owen Lattimore's *Inner Asian Frontiers of China*, Whittaker identifies economic and ecological limits of Roman expansion.[106] Like China, the frontiers actually follow a rough compromise between conquest and economy of rule. Because this could never represent a definite and specific dividing line, the frontiers actually consisted of a broad transitional zone with inner and outer dimensions. These dimensions correspond to economic productivity, and its ability to supply an army in the field without undermining the survival of the people inhabiting the zone. Thus, the frontier is a "limit of growth." This limit would fluctuate over time with climate and development.[107] The demarcation was a conscious and unconscious process: the

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[103] Millar (1993), 226.

[104] Whittaker (1994).

[105] Whittaker (1994), 85. Whittaker himself built this model on Owen Lattimore's analysis of the inner Asian frontiers of China and Mongolia. See O. Lattimore, *Inner Asian Frontiers of China* (New York, 1962), 97-118.

[106] Whittaker (1994), 85.

[107] Whittaker (1994), 85.

economy, society and state, interacting with each other, reached a certain symbiosis which defined the geographical and environmental limits of prosperity. As Whittaker defines it, Romans had some awareness of "the marginal costs of imperialism."[108]

Whittaker supports this materialist conception of frontiers with archaeological data which gives information on ancient zones of arable land which also correspond roughly to Roman fortification lines.[109] However, these lines are not at the edge of arable areas, but rather at some distance behind and following their contours. The fortifications themselves are arrayed not as an impermeable barrier, but rather are quite open. This suggests that the Romans were not trying to bar traffic through the transitional zone, but rather control it. This model works for both the east and eest of the Roman Empire.

The economic and ecological model of frontiers is portable across space and time and could even be applied to fields such as the frontiers of colonial expansion and globalism. In this case, the frontier becomes an economic zone. This economic zone could work well with contact zone theory to explore relationships between the landscape and the formation of identities and culture within these zones. Indeed, the study of frontiers must come down to the application of multiple tools and conceptions in order to get a clear picture of the dynamics and consequences of these phenomena.

Hugh Elton, following on the foundational work of Lattimore and Whittaker, built on the concept of multiple interleaving frontiers which are both independent of each other at a certain

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[108] Whittaker (1994), 86.

[109] Whittaker (1994), 94-95.

level, and interdependent on others, that is military, economic and civil levels.[110] Elton forwards

a multi-faceted approach which attempts to give more detail to the basic analytical structure of

Whittaker's settled, transitional and unsettled zones. Elton defines four overlapping zones:

Roman soldiers, Roman civilians, local natives, and barbarians. Each of these groups then had

their own limits: political, social, ethnic, religious, linguistic, economic, and military. These

elements varied to the degree to which they overlapped or worked independently. Together they

represent the practical functioning of the given frontier as a whole.[111]

Beyond the materialist conception of the frontiers, there is William's 1997 study, *The*

Reach of Rome, which sees the Rome's insistence on creating a clear and manifest circuit of

defenses around the perimeter of the frontier more as a phenomenon of the Roman psyche, which

sought to make the limits of the frontier concrete both for the inhabitants of Rome and those

outside. In this way the material frontier functioned as a grand propaganda statement on Roman

strength and security.[112]

Pollard's 2000 study on the Roman army in Syria looks in detail at the multicultural

composition of a frontier army, its interactions with the civilian population and how it impacted

and interacted with the economy of the region over time.[113] Hence, his study represents a close

application of one of Elton's interleaving frontiers.

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[110] Elton (1996), 1.

[111] Elton (1996), 5.

[112] Williams (1997), 97

[113] N. Pollard, *Soldiers, Cities, and Civilians in Roman Syria (*Ann Arbor, 2000).

W. Ball's 2000 work *Rome in the East* presents a valuable look at the Roman east from the perspective of a near eastern historian rather than a classicist.[114] In the process he decenters much of the traditional western focus on the Roman frontiers in favor of one which looks from the east as well. In 2001, M. Sartre contributed the most in-depth and comprehensive study of provincial societies and cultures in the Near East from the beginning of the Hellenistic period to the late Roman Empire (i.e. the Long Classical Millenium of the fourth century B.C.E. through eighth century C.E.).[115] This work gives an invaluable picture of the interleaving elements of Greek, Roman and local social and cultural elements across the breadth of antiquity. K. Butcher's 2003 synthesis of scholarship on the Roman east weighs more heavily the archaeological evidence, particularly evidence beyond architectural structures, such as pottery, coins, etc., thereby taking advantage of the massive growth of such evidence from the archaeological work done in the last two decades.[116] Dignas and Winter's, *Rome and Persia in Late Antiquity: Neighbours and Rivals* has successfully extended the model of interaction to "official" relations between the two empires, drawing equally from both perspectives to create a more holistic picture of Roman and Persian states in conversation during the period.[117] Finally, D.L. Kennedy showcases the fruits of his last three decades of archaeological surveys and aerial mapping of the Roman Near East to present a micro-look at Sartre's Long Classical Millennium in northwest Jordan.[118] This study well-illustrates how the new wealth of material

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[114] Ball (2000).

[115] M. Sartre, *D'Alexandre a Zenobie. Histoire Levant antique IVe siecle av. J.C. - IIIe siecle ap. J.C.*, rev. ed, (Paris, 2003); English translation and abridgement, *The Middle East Under Rome (*Cambridge, MA, 2005).

[116] K. Butcher, *Roman Syria and the Near East (*Los Angeles, 2003).

[117] Dignas and Winter (2007).

[118] D.L. Kennedy, *Gerasa and the Decapolis*: *A 'Virtual Island' in Northwest Jordan (*London, 2007).

data can be applied to social, cultural and environmental questions on which the literary texts are largely silent.

Roman Versus Barbarian Identity and Concepts of "The Other"

We begin with the Romans' own views of themselves and their place vis-a-vis the peoples they interacted with on the physical frontiers of their world, both in peace and at war. Certainly, the concept of the 'barbarian,' inherited from the Greeks plays a role in this discussion, since the Romans did seem to conceive of the differences between those people who lived in an undeveloped wilderness, and those who lived in a physical world reshaped and harnessed by systematic agriculture and trade.[119]

Sometimes such passages imply a certain nobility or strength to those who live beyond settlement, such as Caesar and Tacitus in his *Germania*. Other times a negative view of the "uncivilized" is implied. For example, Ammianus uses the term "saracens," when referring to the nomadic tent-dwellers of Arabia, in a negative sense comparing them to wild animals,

> The Saracens, however, whom we never found desirable either as friends or as enemies, ranging up and down the country, in a brief space of time laid waste whatever they could find, like rapacious kites which, whenever they have caught sight of any prey from on

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[119] I.e. Caesar's views on the Gauls and Germans in his *De Bello Gallico,* 1.1: "Of all these, the Belgae are the bravest, because they are furthest from the civilization and refinement of [our] Province, and merchants least frequently resort to them, and import those things which tend to effeminate the mind. . ." (6.22): "They do not pay much attention to agriculture, and a large portion of their food consists in milk, cheese, and flesh; nor has any one a fixed quantity of land or his own individual limits; but the magistrates and the leading men each year apportion to the tribes and families, who have united together, as much land as, and in the place in which, they think proper, and the year after compel them to remove elsewhere. For this enactment they advance many reasons-lest seduced by long-continued custom, they may exchange their ardor in the waging of war for agriculture; lest they may be anxious to acquire extensive estates, and the more powerful drive the weaker from their possessions; lest they construct their houses with too great a desire to avoid cold and heat; lest the desire of wealth spring up, from which cause divisions and discords arise; and that they may keep the common people in a contented state of mind, when each sees his own means placed on an equality with [those of] the most powerful." See Julius Caesar, *De bello gallico*, trans.W. A. McDevitte, W. S. Bohn, First Edition (New York, 1869).

high, seize it with swift swoop, and directly they have seized it make off. (2) Although I recall having told of their customs in my history of the emperor Marcus, and several times after that, yet I will now briefly relate a few more particulars about them. (3) Among those tribes whose original abode extends from the Assyrians to the cataracts of the Nile and the frontiers of the Blemmyae all alike are warriors of equal rank, half-nude, clad in dyed cloaks as far as the loins, ranging widely with the help of swift horses and slender camels in times of peace or of disorder. No man ever grasps a plough-handle or cultivates a tree, none seeks a living by tilling the soil, but they rove continually over wide and extensive tracts without a home, without fixed abodes or laws; they cannot long endure the same sky, nor does the sun of a single district ever content them. (4) Their life is always on the move, and they have mercenary wives, hired under a temporary contract. But in order that there may be some semblance of matrimony, the future wife, by way of dower, offers her husband a spear and a tent, with the right to leave him after a stipulated time, if she so elect: and it is unbelievable with what ardour both sexes give themselves up to passion. (5) Moreover, they wander so widely as long as they live, that a woman marries in one place, gives birth in another, and rears her children far away, without being allowed an opportunity for rest. (6) They all feed upon game and an abundance of milk, which is their main sustenance, on a variety of plants, as well as on such birds as they are able to take by fowling; and I have seen many of them who were wholly unacquainted with grain and wine. (7) So much for this dangerous tribe. Let us now return to our original theme.[120]

Such a dichotomy between the inhabitants of the frontiers and the Romans in the literary sources notes the perspective of the "center" at the level of civilization versus the margins. The distinction is both geographic as well as cultural. The geographic aspect is the level to which the land is "tamed" by culture, and the character of the people follows. The wilderness is a place in which the land and its people exist beyond control. Once this land and people are brought into the control, by the expansion of the geographic bounds of the Roman Empire, they in turn take on a different identity as their culture is reshaped by the proximity of "civilization."

Traditional modern scholarship on Romans versus barbarians has well documented this dichotomy. For example, J. Balsdon gives a valuable survey of how the Roman's defined

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[120] Ammianus, *Res gestae,* 14.4.1-7: "Saraceni tamen nec amici nobis umquam nec hostes optandi, ultro citroque discursantes quicquid inveniri poterat momento temporis parvi vastabant milvorum rapacium similes, qui si praedam dispexerint celsius, volatu rapiunt celeri, aut nisi impetraverint, non inmorantur."

themselves as different and distinct from others, and touches on points of contact where there

was some negotiation across the lines.[121] However, Balsdon's study comes from the Roman

perspective and the classical sources themselves. In short, such studies well present what the

Romans thought of themselves in relation to others, but not so much what others thought of the

Romans.

Modern Scholarship on Romans versus Barbarians, and "The Other"

The growth of interest in social history and post colonialism from the 1960's onward

inspired new attempts to look at groups from outside which interacted with the Greco-Roman

sphere. An example is F. Snowden, Jr.'s *Blacks in Antiquity*.[122] Snowden's work departed from

much earlier attempts to look at race in the Greco-Roman world, such as G.H. Beardsley's *The

Negro in Greek and Roman Civilization: A Study of the Ethiopian Type*,[123] which tended to (1)

assert that Greeks and Romans were mythologizing or caricaturing black Africans, or (2) project

modern attitudes towards race and ethnicity back onto ancient peoples.[124] Further, Snowden Jr.

evaluated the classical evidence within the context of then current anthropological and

sociological research.[125]

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[121] J. Balsdon, *Romans and Aliens* (London, 1979).

[122] F.M. Snowden Jr., *Blacks in Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA, 1970).

[123] G.H. Beardsley, *The Negro in Greek and Roman Civilization: A Study of the Ethiopian Type* (London, 1929).

[124] Snowden (1970), ix.

[125] Snowden (1970), ix.

In 1991, M. Bernal's controversial *Black Athena* was published, which challenged the established theory of the Indo-European origin of the Greco-Roman identity in favor of alternative evidence, including archaeological, that these cultures owed much more to Afroasiatic roots than previously held.[126] Though *Black Athena* was largely refuted by scholars, it did revive the trend towards looking at external forces on Greco-Roman culture and identity.[127]

A more recent application of this postcolonial approach applied to European history is M. Pratt's contact zone.[128] An important contribution to an alternative theoretical terminology, Pratt's basic thesis is that European travel writers of the age of colonization furthered imperialist progress by subjugating the exotic places and peoples they encountered with words, which translated what they saw through the lens of their own socialized (i.e. imperializing) European world view. While acting as agents of imperialism, they often spoke from the perspective of innocent bystanders objectively describing their subjects, from a position of superiority, from the high-ground. Thus, to read the writer's accounts in this way gives us a window into imperialism as mirrored in the eyes, the responses, of these Europeans to the peoples and places they recounted. Ironically, this very fact creates the suggestion that accounts of the peoples are not such a good way to get to now these people and places after all. Hence, their accounts often told us more about how Europeans viewed themselves and their society, their own identities, than they did about the peoples they were relating. The difficult and "wild" nature of the landscapes also played a role in this process, as did the physicality of the voyages which they undertook. A

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[126] M. Bernal, *Black Athena*, 2 vols. (New Brunswick, NJ, 1991).

[127] M. Lefkowitz and G.M. Rogers, *Black Athena Revisited* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1996).

[128] M. L. Pratt, *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation* (New York, 2007).

point which resonate when contemplating frontiers like that of Arabia or North Africa in late-antiquity.

Pratt's methodology describes the junctures between the Europeans and their subjects as contact zones, terminology which works against the suggestion of a binary relationship. Europeans are shaping the peoples they come into contact with and translating them into something else, while at the same time the natives are using what is European to interact with across this zone. A code of contact is being developed specific to this zone, described by Pratt as transculturation. What results is neither European nor indigenous any longer. The zone is its own space. So, the frontier becomes a contact zone, a concept more able to deal with the complex interchange and transition which is taking place between the two sides. From this, Pratt develops her concept of *anti-conquest*, which is the way that this interchange creates a naturalization of European power and authority, so that resistance to this becomes a mark of native lack of civilization and development.

Pratt applies contact zones to the question of colonial expansion/imperialism and in doing so, furthers the binary tension inherent in imperial studies. This is one of the subjugator and subjugated, the observer and the observed. Even so, it allows her study to get into that even more interesting question of the transitional contact zone is the place where new cultures are born, and even where new spaces of time and place are born and continue to develop. This is a great improvement in identity studies versus, say Turner's thesis, which places limits on the process of identity formation.

Pratt's contact zone is very portable beyond European imperialism, especially if one takes the basic concept of contact zone and simply uses it as a way to study the dynamics of what we have previously called frontiers. An apt subject would be the Roman frontiers, where a

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definite process of translation and transformation was taking place across a wide and ultimately blurred zone of interaction between what Rome claimed to control and that which lay beyond, but surely not in isolation from Roman territory. east and west, Rome developed symbiotic relationships along the frontiers, ranging from relationships of military alliance to regional and long-distance trade. The mix of Roman and "barbarian" in these relationships within the transitional zone of the frontiers became the nucleus of the post-Roman world, whether that be the Byzantine, the Arab, or the kingdoms of Europe. Like Pratt's colonial world, what was happening in the contact zone would become the future mainstream. The contact zone allows the nuances of such relationships to bring down the traditional frontier dichotomies and see the Roman world in a holistic way, as part of the larger context of the ancient world, and within the temporal context of history.

Pratt's post-structural approach is a powerful tool, both for critiquing the contemporary Greco-Sources on the frontier and its peoples, and later historians looking back on the frontier through "imperial eyes," and western ones at that. For the purposes of this study, Pratt's European "imperial eyes" become the Roman, and the unequal power of the imperial observer leads to a one-sided view of the frontier ingrained in the conscience of historians, who look from the west and write a history of the frontier of and for the west. To read the Roman literary sources as self-defining responses to the local peoples they describe, and the subsequent local reactions to Roman culture likewise, can lead to a better understanding of Roman identity in the larger context, and a resolution of local identity at the fringes of the empire. A specific code of contact for the Arabian frontier might result, and the "broad transitional zone" take on a life of its own. Such a method can better deal with the complex interchanges of the frontier dynamic.

Modern views on the concept of Roman versus barbarian per se are exemplified by

Geary's concept of ethnogenesis.[129] The Roman desire to make the abstract and complex

concrete and simple led them to order and classify ancient peoples synthetically by objectifying

and externalizing them. This process in effect took what were living and evolving local identities

and fossilized them into fixed and portable concepts. An example of this is a geographer such as

Pliny who merely catalogued this data, lumping information about peoples and geographic

locations from a wide array of sources into a new work, which itself would be digested by later

writers. The result was a catalogue of stereotypes which was drawn upon again and again to

discuss external peoples.[130] We see this at work with a term like *saracen,* used by authors such as

Ammianus to denote a wide array of peoples who may in fact bear from little or no resemblance

to another frontier people who bear the same epithet. This is a prime reason why the literary

sources are so problematic for a study of frontier peoples. There is little evidence that the

Romans truly attempted to understand people on the frontiers. It was enough to have a generic

name for each and to fill in as many blanks on the map as possible with as many different names

as possible.[131]

Ethnogenesis worked in a different way for the local peoples themselves. Instead of a

fixed identity which never changed like the Roman attributed ones, frontier peoples themselves

often created and recreated new identities with each new leader, confederacy and group they

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[129] P.J. Geary, "Barbarians and Ethnicity" in G.W. Bowersock, P. Brown, A Grabow, eds., *Late Antiquity: A Guide to the Postclassical World* (Cambridge, MA, 1999), 107-129.

[130] Geary (1999), 105.

[131] Geary (1999), 106.

absorbed or were absorbed into.[132] At the center of this identity was what Geary terms a "kernel of tradition" which derived from the ultimate origin of the people. This practice also allowed the groups which came into contact with Rome to adapt themselves into the concrete imperial system, and this identity became their official Roman identity as well.[133] The concept of ethnogenesis is a valuable tool in understanding the frontier peoples of Arabia, and how these groups and their identities evolved over the course of their contacts with the Roman and Persian empires.

Beyond general theories on barbarian identity, recent specialist books have been written detailing such processes and relations between barbarians and Romans in the west. Examples are *Warfare and Society in the Barbarian West 450-900* and *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376-568* by G. Halsall and *Barbarian Tides* by W. Goffart.[134] Unfortunately, outside of the more general works on the nature of eastern frontiers, little of this caliber has been written on the barbarian peoples of the eastern frontier, at least since I. Shahid's series *Byzantium and the Arabs*, the older volumes of which are now becoming out of date.[135]

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[132] Geary (1999), 106.

[133] Geary (1999), 109.

[134] G. Halsall, *Barbarian Migrations and the Roman West, 376-568* (Cambridge, 2007);
G. Halsall, *Warfare and Society in the Barbarian West, 450-900* (London, 2003); W. Goffart, *Barbarian Tides: The Migration Age and the Later Roman Empire* (Pittsburgh, 2011).

[135] I. Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Sixth Century*, 2 Vols. (Washington D.C., 1997-2002); I Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fifth Century* (Washington D.C., 1989); I. Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth Century* (Washington D.C., 1984); I. Shahid, *Rome and the Arabs. A Prolegomenon to The Study of Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth Century* (Washington D.C., 1984).

The Primary Sources

From the classical period through the early empire, major Greco-Roman literary sources for Arabia include Herodotus, *Histories,* Book III, which gives a survey of ethnography, geography and cultural details on the Arabs of the 5th century B.C.E. Next is the *Geography* of Strabo, Book 16 of which is an important source on the geography of the near east dating from the first century C.E. In the third century C.E. there is Cassius Dio's *History of Rome*, Book 53 of which details an early Roman imperial campaign into the Arabian Peninsula. Josephus's accounts of the Jewish Wars are of tangential interest as well.

For the Late Empire, major sources for this project include Ammianus Marcellinus, whose fourth century account, the *Res gestae*, details Roman campaigns and policies in the east during crucial periods of Late Antiquity. Ammianus's clear dislike for the nomadic peoples of the region has to be taken into account though. The fifth/sixth century *Historia nova* of Zosimus covers the period of imperial crisis. Finally, there are the *Panegyrici Latini,* which gives often spurious details about the Roman emperors of this period, and often in the same vein, Procopius's *Bellum Persicum* which details Roman campaigns on the eastern frontiers in the sixth century, including valuable information on the Arab confederacies which were becoming more influential during this period.[136]

The project will also draw upon several late antique Christian texts, the most important of which are records of church councils from the east as a source for religious dynamics in the

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[136] See Zosimus, *Historia nova*, ed. L. Mendelssohn, comm. F. Paschoud (Bude, 1971-1989); *Panegyrici Latini*, ed. B.S. Rodgers (Berkeley, 1978); Procopius, *Bellum Persicum*, ed. & trans, H.B. Dewing (Cambridge, MA, 1935).

region, as well as references to local peoples and events in others including the *Historia ecclesiastica* of Evagrius Scholasticus and Zacharias Rhetor, the *Chronographia* of Jacob of Edessa, John Malalas, and Joshua Stylites, the *Vitae* of John of Ephesus, the *De mortibus persecutorum* of Lactantius, the *Bibliotheca* of Photius, and the *Epitome* of Theodorus Lector.[137]

Other Roman texts of use are the legal entries of the *Codex Theodosianus* and *Corpus iuris civilis* and the lists of imperial military and civilian offices, both text and illustrations, in the *Notitia dignitatum* as well as the map of the the imperial road network, the *Tabula Peutingeriana.*[138]

Non-Greco-Roman Texts

Wherever possible, this project will look outside the Greco-Roman sources to allow a voice to the external as well as internal frontier. Of importance are Persian texts such as the *Chronicle of Seert* and the Sasanian inscription of Paikuli, which mark relations between the Persian Empire and frontier peoples. Then there is the Arab historiographical tradition from the early Islamic period, including the *Tarikh* of Tabari, Hisham al-Kalbi's *Gamharat an-Nasab,* Ibn Habib's *Kitab al-muhabbar,* the *Tarikh of* Hamza al-Isfahani, Ibn Ishaq's *Life of Muhammad,*

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[137] See Evagrius Scholasticus, *Historia ecclesiastica*, trans. and comm. M. Whitby (Oxford, 2000); Zacharias Rhetor, *Historia ecclesiastica Zachariae Rhetori vulgo adscripta*. E.W. Brooks, ed. (Louvain 1919-1924); Jacob of Edessa, *Chronographia*, E.W. Brooks, ed. and trans. (Paris, 1905-07); Malalas, *Chronographia*, I. Thurn, ed. (Berlin, 2000); Joshua Stylites, *Chronographia*, W. Wright, ed. and trans. (Cambridge, 1882); Lactantius, *De mortibus persecutorum*, J.L. Creed, ed. (Oxford, 1984); Photius, *Bibliothèque*, R. Henry, ed. (Paris, 1967); Theodorus Lector, *Historia ecclesiastica (Epitome),* G.C. Hansen, ed. (Berlin, 1995).

[138] See *Codex Theodosianus*, T. Mommsen, ed. (Berlin, 1905); *Corpus iuris civilis*, 3 vols, T. Mommsen, P. Krueger, eds. (Berlin, 1895); *Notitia dignitatum*, O. Seeck, ed., (Berlin, 1876); *Die Peutingersche Tafel*, K. Miller, ed. (Stuttgart, 1962).

and Ibn Kathir's *The Life of the Prophet Muhammad.* These Arab sources give much more specific and nuanced information on the origins, nature and geographic range of the nomadic peoples of the transitional and unsettled zones. They also carry their own bias which must be considered as well.[139]

The Material Sources

Of crucial value in this project is the final field report on the Limes Arabicus, which completed a new survey of the Roman Frontier in central Jordan from 1980-89.[140] The survey built upon an earlier 1976 study which collected chronological evidence on the fortifications of the Strata. Following this, the 1980 survey collected evidence for sedentary and nomadic culture and settlement across the Strata from the first through seventh centuries A.D, including structures, campsites and inscriptions. This project intends to synthesize this data with that from earlier archaeological reports on the region in order to form a deeper understanding of the nature of this frontier.

This project examines evidence which further qualifies the use of the individual structures of the Strata, indicating, perhaps, that this line acted as a permeable frontier rather than a strictly exclusionary one. For example, the existence of structures used as toll or customs stations, as noted elsewhere in the empire, furthers such an interpretation. The existence of

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[139] See *Chronicle of Seert*, A. Scher, ed. and trans., in *Patrologia Orientalis* 13 (1919); *The Sassanian inscription of Paikuli*, Helmut Humbach & Prods O. Skjaervo eds. (Wiesbaden, 1978); Tabari, *Tarikh*, M. Ibrahim ed., 10 vols. (Cairo, 1960-69); Hisham al-Kalbi. *Gamharat an-Nasab: Das genealogische Werk des Hisham ibn Muhammad al-Kalbi*, 2 vols., W. Caskel ed. (Leiden, 1960); Ibn Habib, *Kitab al-muhabbar*, I. Lichtenstadter, ed. (Hyderabad, 1947); Hamza al-Isfahani, *Taʾrīkh sinī mulūk al-arḍ wa ʾl-anbiyāʾ*, I.M.E. Gottwaldt, ed. (Berlin 1921-22); Ibn Ishaq, *The Life of Muhammad. A Translation of "Ishaq's Sirat Rasul Allah,"* trans. A. Guillaume (Oxford, 1997); Ibn Kathir, *The Life of the Prophet Muhammad*, Vol. I, *Al-Sira al-Nabawiyya,* trans. R. Le Gassick (Reading, 2000).

[140] S.T. Parker (2006).

imperial milestones and dedicatory inscriptions is important for understanding the phases of construction and the propaganda value of the frontier.

Evidence on how native peoples were interacting with Romans on the Arabian frontier further advances the "zone of interaction." For example, detailed analysis of the material culture found at key towns of the frontier is possible for certain sites, such as the legionary base of Umm-el-Jimal. Working from field reports of excavations done at the site under Bert de Vries form 1972-1981, we can identify a relationship of interaction between the settled Strata and the nomadic peoples of the outlying desert regions, based on a wealth of information on the development of legionary fortifications in the town as well as inscriptional and other evidence.[141]

Aerial surveys and mapping of ancient Arabia allow a larger picture of the landscape in relation to the material culture to emerge. Tangential to this study was a new aerial survey of the overall fortified line of the frontier by Kennedy, who built upon the work of the aerial photographer Poidebard in the 1930's.[142]

Epigraphic evidence is also key in this study. Sites within and without Roman territory preserve evidence that the leaders of these peoples, and the peoples themselves, actively moved across the zone and that the people of the desert were linked with those of the settled zones. Examples include a key third century inscription from the legionary base of Umm al- Jemal in

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[141] B. de Vries, "Umm El-Jimal: A Frontier Town and its Landscape in Northern Jordan," Vol. 1, Journal of Roman Archaeoogy, Supplementary Series 26 (Oxford, 1998); B. de Vries, "Continuity and Change in the Urban Character of the Sourthern Hauran from the 5th to the 9th Century: The Archaeological Evidence at Umm el-Jimal," *Mediterranean Archaeologist* 13 (2000), 39-45; B. de Vries, "Paradox of Power: Between Local and Imperial at Umm el-Jimal," In *Crossing Jordan: North American Contributions to the Archaeology of Jordan* (London, 2007).

[142] D. Kennedy, D. Riley, *Rome's Desert Frontier from the Air* (London, 1990); A. Poidebard, *La Trace de Rome dans le desert Syrie* (Paris, 1934).

southern Jordan, attesting the nomadic leader Jadhima and his Tanukh confederacy.[143] This

bilingual inscription mentions the teacher of a certain Gadimathos (Jadhima) who is "King of the

Thanoumenoi" (Tanukh).

Another exceptional inscription found at al-Namarah, a Roman legionary fort of the

Strata Diocletiana gives further weight and context to this confederacy.[144] Additonally there are

a set of inscriptions written in Safaitic form, or in proto-Arabic script, the language of the

nomads, yet found within the settled zone, and corresponding to similar inscriptions found in the

nomadic zone.[145]

An ideal focal point for the development of the frontier in Arabia in all its facets was the

Nabataean/Roman town of Umm el-Jimal. This study owes much to the evidence found there

and thus we will continually return to it in the course of this project.

Umm el-Jimal lies about midway along the route between Petra and major trade center of

Palmyra, near the provincial capital of Bostra. This was a strategic point, about as far into the

desert as any outpost, and in effect demarcating the edge of Roman projection of power on the

frontier. Further, it was the trade route for caravans from the Red Sea in the South to Palmyra in

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[143] This town was located 35 miles south-southwest of Bostra on the Strata Diocletiana. See E. Littmann, *Semitic Inscriptions*, Division IV, Section A, Nabataean Inscriptions, "Umm idj-Djimal," No. 41, *PAES* 1913, pp. 34-56); E. Littmann, *Semitic Inscriptions*, Nabatean Inscriptions from the Southern Hauran *PAES* (1914); M.M. De Vogue, *Semitic Inscriptions*, 122, no. 11; *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinorum*, 2.192, *PE* 3.238; Further commentary by Littmann in M.M. De Vogue, *Florilegium*, 386-390; Comments in M. Sartre, *Trois etudes sur l'Arabie romaine et byzantine* (Brussels, 1982),134, n. 50.

[144] This is the third oldest example of written Arabic in existence, after the Jadhima inscription. See J. A. Bellamy, "Arabic Verses from The First/Second Century: The Inscription Of `En `Avdat," *Journal of Semitic Studies*, Volume 35, (1990), 73-79. Since its discovery in 1901 by Rene Dussaud and Frederic Macler, the details of the reading of the "Namarah inscription" were a subject of some controversy, until the Arabist James Bellamy put a rest to the debate surrounding its remaining cruces in two articles of 1985 and 1987. See J. Bellamy, "A New Reading of the Namarah Inscription," *Journal of the American Oriental Society,* vol. 105 (1985), 31-48.

[145] *PAES*, Div. IV, Sec. C.

the north. Indeed, the meaning of its Arabic name, Umm el-Jimal, "Mother of Camels," indicates such a role in the ancient trade network of the region.[146] This fact also helps explain its beginnings as a Nabataean village in the first/second centuries, since its site would fit well into the trade and communications networks of the kingdom as it extended its economic power northward from Petra along the trade routes into Syria. Its Nabataean roots perhaps also lend some insight into the incorporation of the earlier town into the Roman defenses of the *Strata Diocletiana* in the late-second century, as Rome moved to fully integrate the client Nabataeans into the zone of direct imperial control from the time of Trajan onwards.[147]

Rome assumed direct responsibility not only for the governance, but also the defense of Nabataea against Persia, as it had other frontier centers of power such as Palmyra. A part of this entailed new direct relations with the nomadic peoples of the undefined desert zone between Rome and Persia. These peoples had long formed an important part of the defensive plan of the Nabataeans before the Roman era. Now they would become an important factor in Rome's defensive plan as *foederati*, which we will return to later. At any rate, the layers of interchange among the Nabataeans, Greco-Romans, and nomadic peoples of the desert created a unique multicultural personality for this region, which the evidence at Umm el-Jimal illustrates. Although located within six kilometers of the *Strata Diocletiana*, the extensive line of castellated forts forming a seemingly concrete divide between Rome and the Persian Empire, the experience of Umm el-Jimal belies the classic view of the Roman frontier in Arabia as a line of fortified opposition. Rather, the evidence at the site speaks to the transitional desert zone as a cross-

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[146] The Roman name of the town is lost to us, which is a disadvantage from the inability to place it in the literary context more firmly, but an advantage in allowing the evidence from the site to speak for itself independently. For a discussion of the name issue see B. de Vries (1998), 36ff.

[147] Officially annexed as a province by Trajan in 106. See G.W. Bowersock, *Roman Arabia* (1983), 81.

cultural conduit of sorts, and thus valuable for understanding the frontier as a hub in the interplay

of diverse forces on the fringes of the Roman Empire in the east.

Specifically, three points grant Umm el-Jimal a voice in the nature of the frontier as

center: (1) The archaeological history of the site allows the local to speak as the center.

Traditional Greco-Roman literary sources focused on the macro-dynamics of the empire as a

whole, with the political and military at the center of their interest. Hence, they were little

concerned with local micro-affairs, in effect robbing the local of its identity in the process. Great

strides have been and continue to be made in creating a living archaeological voice for the

frontier. Umm el-Jimal rests at the forefront of this progress, as the best preserved of all late-

Roman sites in Arabia, and as the most intact example of a rural town from 4th-9th c. in the

eastern Mediterranean.[148] Furthermore, less archaeological work has been completed for other

sites in the immediate region, making Umm el-Jimal a very important representative for the

frontier in this sector. In comparison with other key sites on the frontier, especially the provincial

capital of Bostra, Umm el-Jimal gives a glimpse into normal life in the Roman Empire during

this era from the rural rather than the urban perspective. Combined with more extensive ground

surveys, Umm el-Jimal can give a clearer view of the relationship between the settled Roman

and local elements outside of the more "imperial" gravity of a major urban center. In addition,

Umm el-Jimal saw continuous Roman occupation from the second through sixth centuries, and

so can give a broad temporal perspective on the development of the Roman frontier town as the

era progressed.

(2) Contacts between the nomads of the open desert and the peoples of the settled zone at

Umm el-Jimal. Of particular focus for this study is how the development and fate of the frontier's

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[148] De Vries (1998), 9.

cultivated zone was linked with the changing socio-political dynamics of the transitional desert zone itself, especially the nature and role of nomadic confederacies. The traditional "inside" view of the Greco-Roman literary sources viewed these nomads as transitory elements of instability and as unpredictable threats to security. However, crucial epigraphic evidence found at Umm el-Jimal, combined with that from other frontier sites and the Arab historical sources gives us a new historical narrative of the nomads generated from the frontier as center, rather than Greco-Roman.

(3) Religion. Through the lens of traditional Greco-Roman sources, religion is often treated as a top-down element dictated from above, perhaps even imposed upon and independent of the local society, similar to the way in which politics, the military and the economy are addressed. However, a crucial part of giving the frontier a central voice is to view religion as generated from the local, or at least as locally interpreted. Umm el-Jimal lies at the cultural transition between Syria and Arabia, the political interchange of Rome and Nabataea, and the economic intersection of sedentary agriculture and pastoral nomadism, *the Badiya*.[149] At such a crossroads, there is evidence to support religion as a guiding element of local identity and indeed cultural stability running through the various phases of political and economic transition going on around it. Furthermore, religious patterns at Umm el-Jimal comment to effect on the unique religious character of Arabia and southern Syria vis-a-vis the context of imperial Christianity.

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[149] B. de Vries, "Between the Cults of Syria and Arabia: Traces of Pagan Religion at Umm el-Jimal", Unpublished from the author, 177.

Figure 3: Provinces of Roman Near East

CHAPTER TWO:
THE PHYSICAL FRONTIER:
BARRIER, GATE OR IDEA?

In creating a more nuanced picture of the Arabian frontier, this chapter pursues several main points: (1) An understanding of the nature of the eastern frontier must begin with the geography of the region, which consisted of several overlapping and interrelating micro-regions defining human settlement patterns and hence the nature of the historical material defenses and parameters of the frontier. (2) The time-table of fortification and therefore probable intent and nature of the buildup occurred in an ad hoc manner over a long period of time, which belies any notion of a larger strategic plan of defense. (3) The number of fortifications increased over time under a long string of emperors, but the overall size and number of forces remained relatively static. (4) Most importantly, the nature of Roman roads as trade and communication routes, in addition to defensive infrastructure provides an alternative view of the military frontier; the buildings of the frontier could have provided services to those traveling the road, tax collection, as well as local security against isolated threats from bandits. Indeed, the small size of garrisons in fortifications along the road supports such a nuanced view. (5) A comparison of the eastern frontier with other similar frontiers such as north Africa and Scotland suggests that the Romans were more interested in controlling the traffic along the frontiers rather than barring outsiders absolutely.

The Geographic Frontier

The region from Rusafa in the north to Yemen in the south comprised a mix of climatic zones ranging from arable farm land to semi-arid and arid pastoral desert. Geologic and archaeological evidence suggests that these zones shifted and evolved over time, depending on

year to year climatic variations. Communities in this region fluctuated between a sedentary and nomadic existence, and sometimes a combination of the two, giving a character and identity unique among peoples of the late-antique Near East. Geographic conditions defined a diverse cultural basin between the more permanently settled regions of the Persian Empire in the east and the Roman Empire in the west. The fluctuations of this cultural basin in a given period had direct effects on the development of the peoples of this area and their role in the larger economic and political currents of the superpowers on either side from the third through sixth centuries.
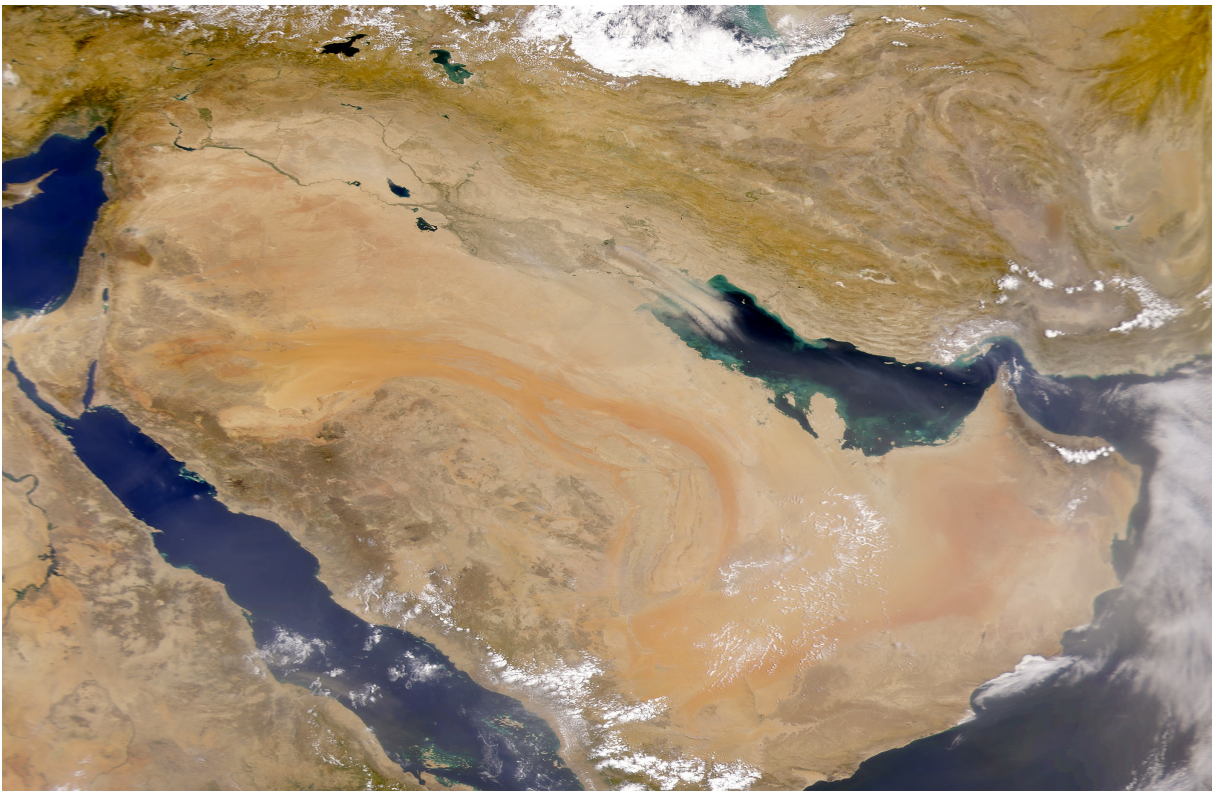

Figure 4: Satellite view of Arabian Peninsula

From Macro to Micro-regions

From the Mediterranean coastal ranges of the Levant, which comprise the western edge of the basin, Roman occupation arched northward into Syria and eventually towards the Tigris/Euprates and the Persian Empire in the east. This arc of urban development corresponded with the Jordan Valley and Dead Sea drainages from the mountains into the open desert in the east.

Five distinct micro-regions are delineated: (1) the Jordan Valley; (2) the Ajlun Highlands; (3) the Belqa; (4) the pre-desert and (5) the desert proper. Elevation reliefs indicate that the oldest and most developed cities occupy the highlands of region 2, centering on Gerasa at the heart of the Greco-Roman Decapolis, or ten-cities, all of whose foundation date to before Roman occupation.[1] Descending from the highlands regions 3 and 4 comprise plains and pre-desert steppe. Finally, region 5, of most interest to this discussion, is the eastern fringe of settlement, where later secondary urban areas were further developed by the Romans, most notably the provincial capital of Bostra in the northwest, and Umm el-Jimal to the South, along the transitional desert zone which forms the edge of this crescent.

Rainfall maps further define the zone. This indicates more than sufficient precipitation for crops of all kinds in the Ajlun and Belqa (regions 2 and 3). In the Madaba and the predesert there was sufficient precipitation for cereal crops such as barley, which archaeology shows was a staple of this zone throughout antiquity. Finally, the edge of the desert zone of region 5 would have fluctuated depending on the year and local harnessing of subterranean springs. There is archaeological evidence of earthworks designed to harness and collect sporadic rainfall for use in stabilizing the zone for crops, such as those in the zone between Qasr el-Hallabat and Umm el-

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[1] Kennedy (2007), 56.

Jimal in the southern Hauran.[2] Soil analyses of the regions shows a coincidence of rich soils with

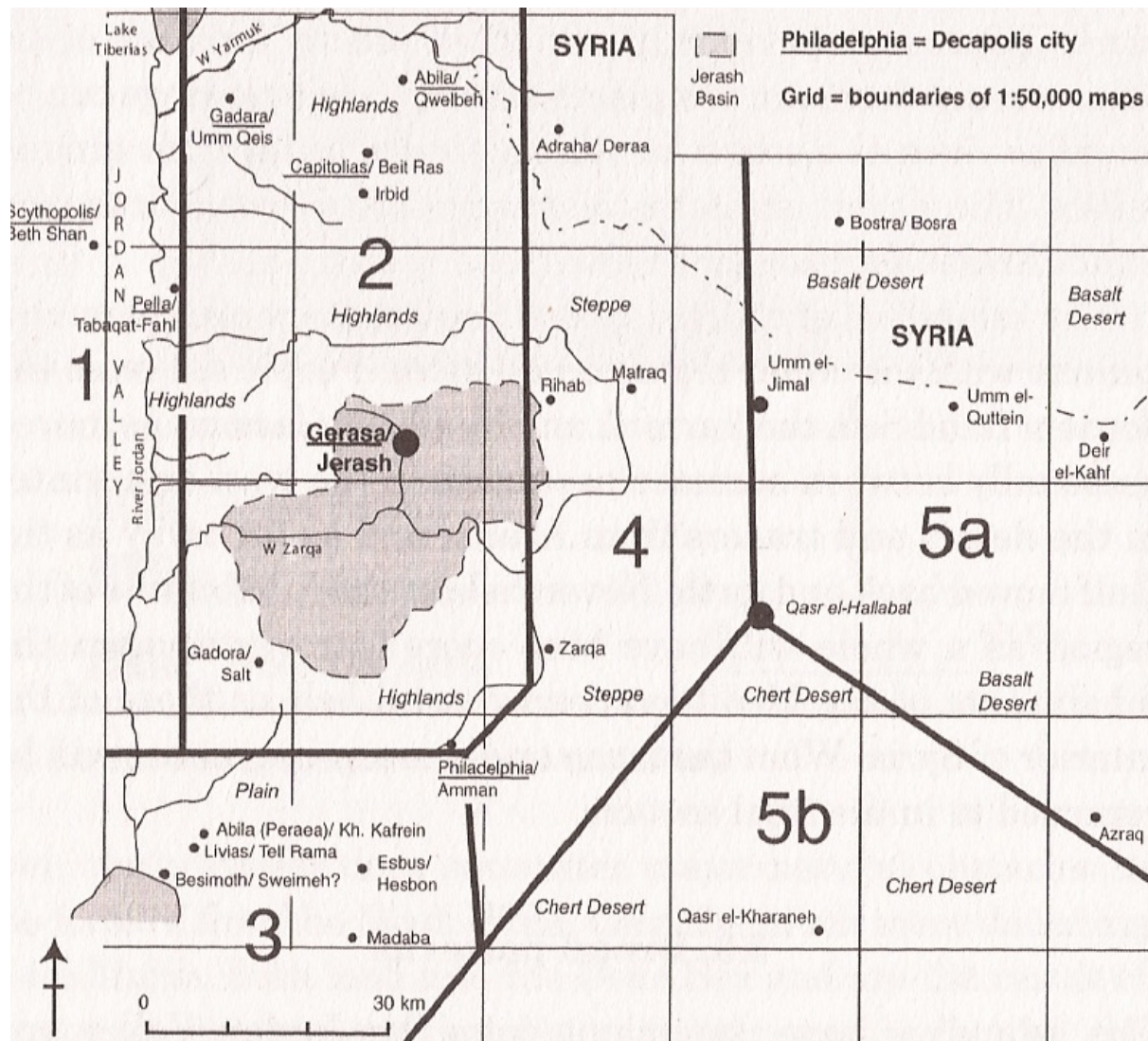the areas of greatest precipitation, also corresponding to the areas of known ancient agriculture.[3]

Figure 5: Micro-regions

[2] Kennedy (2007), 72-73.

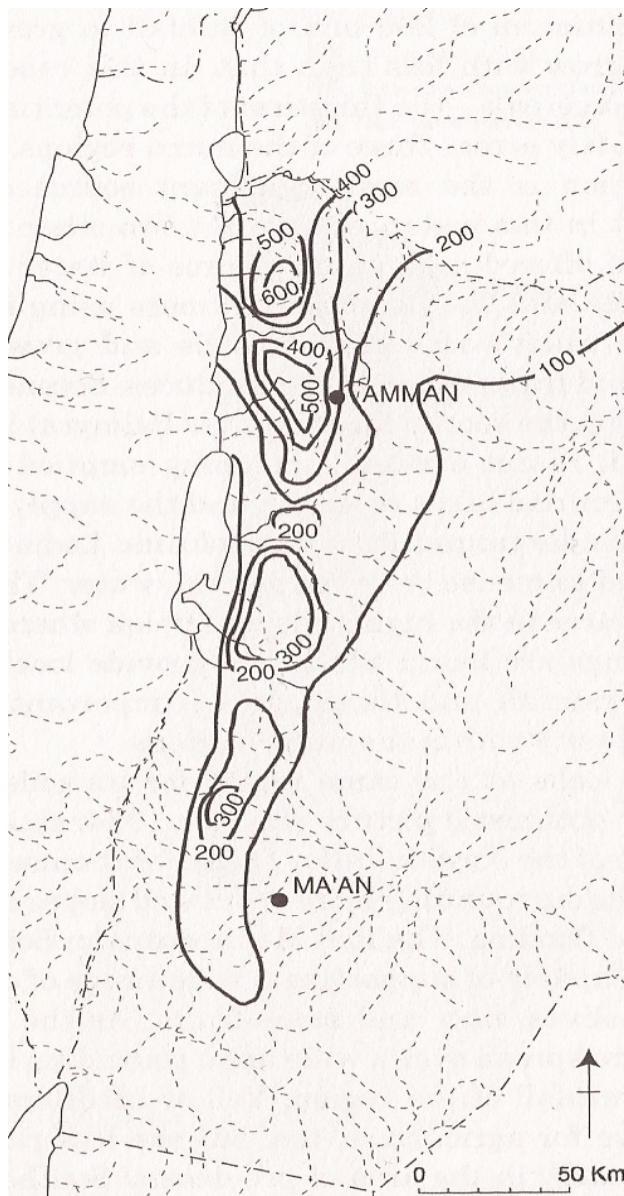[3] Kennedy (2007), 59-61.

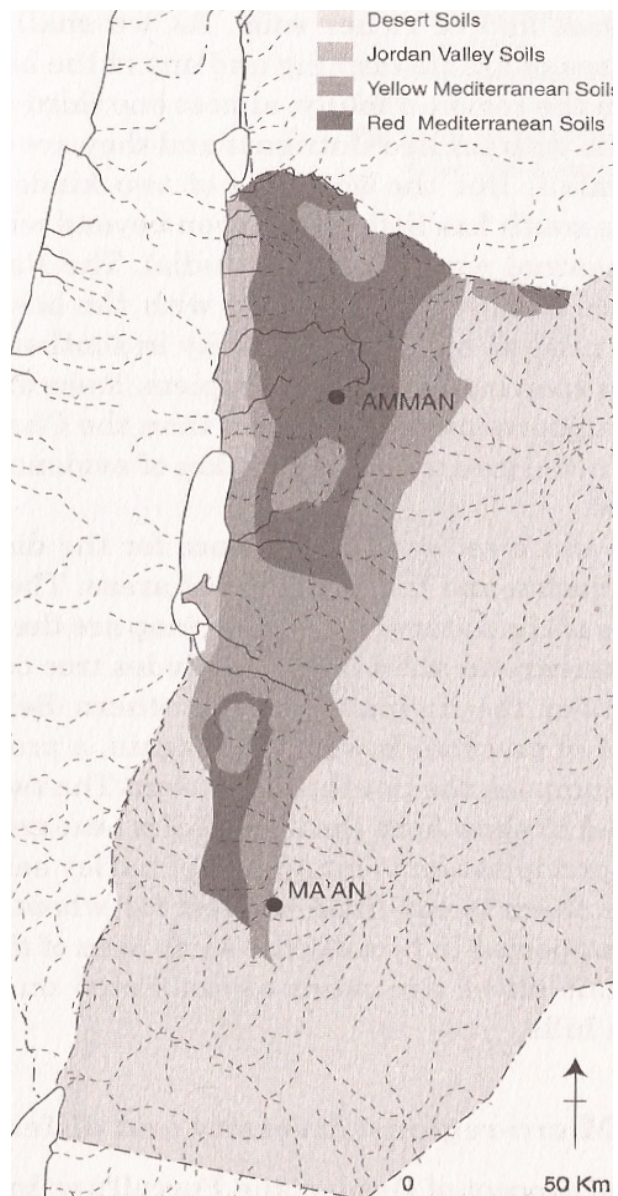Figure 6: Rainfall (mm./yr.)

Figure 7: Soil variation

The provincial boundaries along the predesert of the Bostra-Umm el-Jimal line fade into the desert, the *de facto* physical limit of Roman power, corresponding with the geographic conditions and delineated concretely by the line of fortifications and roads comprising the *Strata Diocletiana*, discussed in detail below. Practical comparisons of the functions of this frontier might be made those in North Africa and at Hadrian's Wall. In each case, geography coincides with occupation, and politics with permanent settlement. Perhaps most importantly, just as in Africa and Scotland, the fortifications are an acknowledgement that there are people of importance in the seemingly empty spaces beyond.

Economic Symbiosis of the Pre-desert and Desert

Studies of Hadrian's Wall in England have shown a high frequency of gates in the fortified line, suggesting a regular requirement to pass the walls both ways, whether by locals or by the Romans. Similarly, the fortifications in Arabia are at wide intervals hardly suited to securing a broad expanse of desert against nomads on their own ground. An analysis of the actual motives for and use of these structures is to be found below in the section on the Roman military presence, but part of the answer to the question is found in the geographic dictates of the frontier itself. That is, that economy of the desert population was in mutual symbiosis with that of the settled zone. The products of the inner desert found a market on its settled fringes, and at the same time, the products of the settled zone found a market among the nomads. Rather than being separated by geography and culture, differences actually brought them together. The fortifications were there simply to regulate and protect traffic across/along the frontier.

The reason this zone was chosen to defend is that it was the boundary between the settled and nomadic parts of the frontier. This boundary was a rough one due to the vagueness of

weather patterns in such a region. Rainfall maps speak of averages over time, not annual

fluctuations, which could be great, and have corresponding effects on the economy of a given

micro-region. This was particularly the case for the transitional region 5. Here the proverb, "The

year bears the crop not the soil," was no where more pertinent. When precipitation was more

scarce barley would have been planted, often utilizing simple water impeding structures to create

arable areas. Numerous examples of these are found in ground surveys. Cisterns, some holding

up to 68,000 cu. ft. of water were constructed to collect the runoff from flash floods in the wadis.

In drought years the frontier returned to semi-nomadic economy.[4] Even the nomads themselves

were in the habit of sowing seed in suitable areas on the chance of creating grazing for their

livestock to use when they returned to the area the next season.[5]

Safaitic inscriptions are evidence that nomads spent time in the towns of the pre-desert,

perhaps in the summer when they were not grazing their livestock in the open desert.[6] The extent

of nomadic involvement in the settled zone is unclear. It could have been as great as providing

labor and animal power during harvest time, in addition to the sale of their agricultural products

in the markets of the towns. At any rate, the geographic symbiosis of the frontier created a cross-

cultural zone which reached to the extent of politics and the military as well.

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[4] Kennedy (2007) 73-75.

[5] Kennedy (2007), 70-74.

[6] See chapter 3 for examples.

Natural Routes

Finally, geography affected natural routes of travel and communication on the frontier. Strategic highways like the *Via Nova Trajana*, constructed in 114 C.E., were limited by water supplies and the natural lay of the land. This major Roman highway connected Philadelphia with the provincial capital of Bostra, linking with the King's Highway from the Red Sea to Petra.[7]

At the least, the fortifications of the *Strata Diocletiana* would have been aimed at protecting this route, or at least providing support for it. So again, the basic structure of Roman presence fit to geographic constraints. This is important when one considers the nomad presence as well. Since they alone could operate in conditions of the inner desert, they in effect became a limitation to Roman power. So, in Roman fashion, attention was given to forming alliances with these nomadic powers, such as the nomadic client king Imru'ul Qays, who is attested as a client king of Constantine on his tomb dating to 325. Nevertheless, these nomadic navigators of the desert basin also dealt with the Persians on the opposite shore, leveraging their unique position there and vis-a-vis other powers such as Palmyra. These issues will be discussed fully in the chapter on the nomadic element.

The nature of the Roman frontier in Arabia, its structure, inhabitants, economy and military concerns cannot be fully understood in isolation from its geographic situation and dictates. Just as the nomads and peoples of the settled zone needed to act in symbiosis for their mutual survival, so too did Rome negotiate a symbiosis of its own with a harsh region which marked the effective limits of its power.

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[7] Kennedy (2007), 76.

Fig. 1.   Roman roads in Judaea and Arabia.

Figure 8: Roman Roads in Judaea and Arabia

The Fortified Frontier

There are two main elements to the fortified eastern frontier: a road network and a network of fortified structures along the length of the roads. The exact relationship between these two elements is of primary importance in understanding the dynamics of the frontier during late antiquity and connections between the settled zone and the desert. The evidence leads to a complex answer with the following points: (1) The road network predates the Roman era and was there in its own right as a commercial route from the Red Sea north to Nabataea and beyond. (2) There is evidence of fortification of this network during pre-Roman times, both to protect the traffic along it and to protect population of the settled edge of the desert from external threats. (3) The Roman expansion of the network and its fortifications was both a continuation of the previous role of the roads and a conseqence of new and more far reaching security concerns during the imperial period.

The Nabataean Period

There is no literary or archaeological evidence to suggest extensive sedentary settlement of the transitional desert fringe east of the Dead Sea before the first century B.C.E. Prior to this, Hellenistic rulers seemed little interested in the region and what local habitation there may have been was most likely nomadic. Indeed, the social and political history of the region begins with the Nabataeans, who were themselves of nomadic origin.[8] The first literary mention of the Nabataeans is in 312 B.C.E. when Diodorus, following Hieronymus of Cardia, states that the Hellenistic ruler Antigonus Monophthalmos led a campaign against them. Diodorus goes on to

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[8] S.T. Parker (2006), 527.

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say that they are a nomadic people with an economy based on pastoralism, raiding and the spice trade with southern Arabia.[9]

By the second century B.C.E. the Nabataeans had become sedentary and begin to appear more prominently in the archaeoligical and literary sources.[10] Josephus relates a campaign against them by the Hasmonean ruler Alexander Jannaeus (103-76 B.C.E.), which saw a subsequent return of rule to the Nabataeans king Obodas I, whom Josephus calls "the king of the Arabs."[11] Later, Josephus says that the Hasmonean king Hyrcanus II offered to return a certain "twelve cities which Alexander had taken from the Arabs" to the Nabataean king Aretas III in exchange for his support in returning to the throne.[12] Though the identification of these cities is unclear, their location must have been on the Kerak plataeu which confirms Nabataean power in this region at the time.[13]The arrival and sedentarization of the Nabataeans began to accelerate in the first century B.C.E. followed closely by the first direct Roman intervention in the region under Pompey in 64 B.C.E, who granted the Nabataean state client status as part of his settlement of the region.[14] This period through the first century C.E. also marked the peak of

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[9] Diodorus, *Biblioteca historica*, 2.48.1-6; 19.94.2-4. See Diodorus Siculus, *Biblioteca historica*, Vol. 2, trans. C.H. Oldfather, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA, 1935).

[10] Strabo, *Geographia,* 16.4.21-26; Bowersock (1983), 12-18.

[11] Josephus, *De antiquitate judaico,* 13.374. See Josephus, *De antiquitate judaico*, trans. L.H. Feldman (Cambridge, MA, 1930-65). See also Parker (2006), 528.

[12] Josephus, *De antiquitate judaico,* 14.18.

[13] Parker (2006), 528; J.M. Miller, *Archaeological Survey of the Kerak Plateau,* American Schools of Oriental Research Archaeological Reports 1 (Atlanta, 1991), 11.

[14] Parker (2006), 528.

settlement and population density in the archaeological record, no doubt aided by the Nabataeans status as a Roman client.[15]

This period also represents the beginning of the fortification of the frontier, though not by the Romans, but rather the Nabataeans themselves. The archaeological record shows a string of forts and watchtowers built along the edge of the settled zone, clearly protecting and supporting the major commercial route from Heliopolis, Egypt to Aila (Aquaba) on the Red Sea and then north to Nabataea.[16] From Persian times it was known as the King's Highway, but had been a coveted trade route for all the peoples of the region before the Nabataeans inherited control of it.[17] This road would later become the *via nova Traiana* when Trajan annexed the region in the second century C.E. The main highway ran from Aila (Aquaba) on the Red Sea to Syria. A second spur forked from Rabbah and ran along the edge of the desert and rejoining the main road north of Damascus.[18] (See map below)

The Wadi-al-Hasa archaeological survey recorded evidence of an extensive Nabataean road network in the region which included a fortification network of watchtowers, and signalling stations atop the ridgeline adjacent to the road.[19] Archaeology has shown that the Nabataean fortifications were in fact built upon earlier Iron Age forts in many instances.[20] In addition to

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[15] Parker (2006), Fig. 2.3, 529.

[16] Parker (2006), 529.

[17] Parker (2006), 529.

[18] Parker (2006), 529.

[19] B. MacDonald, *The Wadi-al-Hasa Archaeological Survey 1979-83, West-Central Jordan* (Waterloo, 1988), 212.

[20] Parker (2006), 530.

reoccupying earlier forts, the Nabataeans also constructed a series of watchtowers on the fringe of the desert which were spaced to be in site of each other, perhaps to relay signals to warn of an incursion.[21]

The protection of water supplies in the desert was an issue as well. For example, a Nabataean fort at Bayir protected this oasis which was a key watering point for traffic on the route from the King's Highway into the interior of the Arabian Peninsula and thence to Babylon via the Wadi-al-Hafira and Wadi-Sirhan. (marked in brown on the map below).[22] The Nabataean settlements of Rabba and Dhiban were located along these routes and benifitted from the trade.[23]

The archaeology shows that trade was only part of the Nabataean economy. Hundreds of sites are located away from the main trade routes. The economy of these settlements was agriculture, a mix between farming and pastoralism as befit the transitional climate on the edge of the desert.[24] Evidence of Nabataean habitation was also found in large numbers of campsites along the fringe of the desert, indicating that Nabataean influence extended beyond the settled zone.[25]

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[21] Parker (2006), 530.

[22] S.L. Rolston, G.O. Rollefson, "The Wadi Bayir Paleoanthropological Survey," *ADAJ* 26 (1982), 211-19.

[23] Parker (2006), 529.

[24] Parker (2006), 529.

[25] Parker (2006), 529.

Figure 9: Major routes in Roman Near East

Trajan and Direct Roman Rule

Emperor Trajan's annexation of the Nabataean state in 106 C.E. seems to have been motivated by three main concerns: (1.) the desire to control the lucrative trade through the region. (2.) the inability of the Nabataeans themselves to sufficiently guard the trade routes without outside aid. (3.) Trajan's desire to extend Roman influence with a view to his ambition to confront the Parthian Empire to the east.[26]

All of these motivations well explain Trajan's immediate strengthening and expansion of the the earlier Nabataean road and fortification network. The King's Highway now became the *via nova Traiana,* which was paved and improved with numerous bridges between 111 and 114 as attested by milestones.[27] In addition to the main road, other regional roads were improved, such as that from Philadelphia to Ziza and Pella to Gerasa.[28]

Although the bulk of the long-distance sea trade passeed through Egyptian ports on the Red Sea by this time,[29] the Transjordan continued to benefit from commercial traffic as evidenced by Petra's continued prosperity after 106 as well as that of the Decapolis cities to the north.[30] Also, the Petra-Gaza road continued in use by caravans through the fourth century.[31] Besides the motive to control long-distance trade through the region, archaeological surveys

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[26] Parker (2006), 531.

[27] P. Thomsen, "Die römischen Meilensteine der Provinzen Syria, Arabia und Palästina," *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins* (*ZDPV*) 40 (1917), Nos. 215, 216, 218b, 220.

[28] Thomsen (1917), No. 113.

[29] For discussion see S.E. Sidebotham, *Roman Economic Policy in the Eurythra Thalassa: 30 B.C.-A.D. 217* (Leiden, 1986).

[30] Parker (2006), 533.

[31] H.D. Cohen, "New Light on the Petra-Gaza Road," *BA* 45 (1982), 240-47.

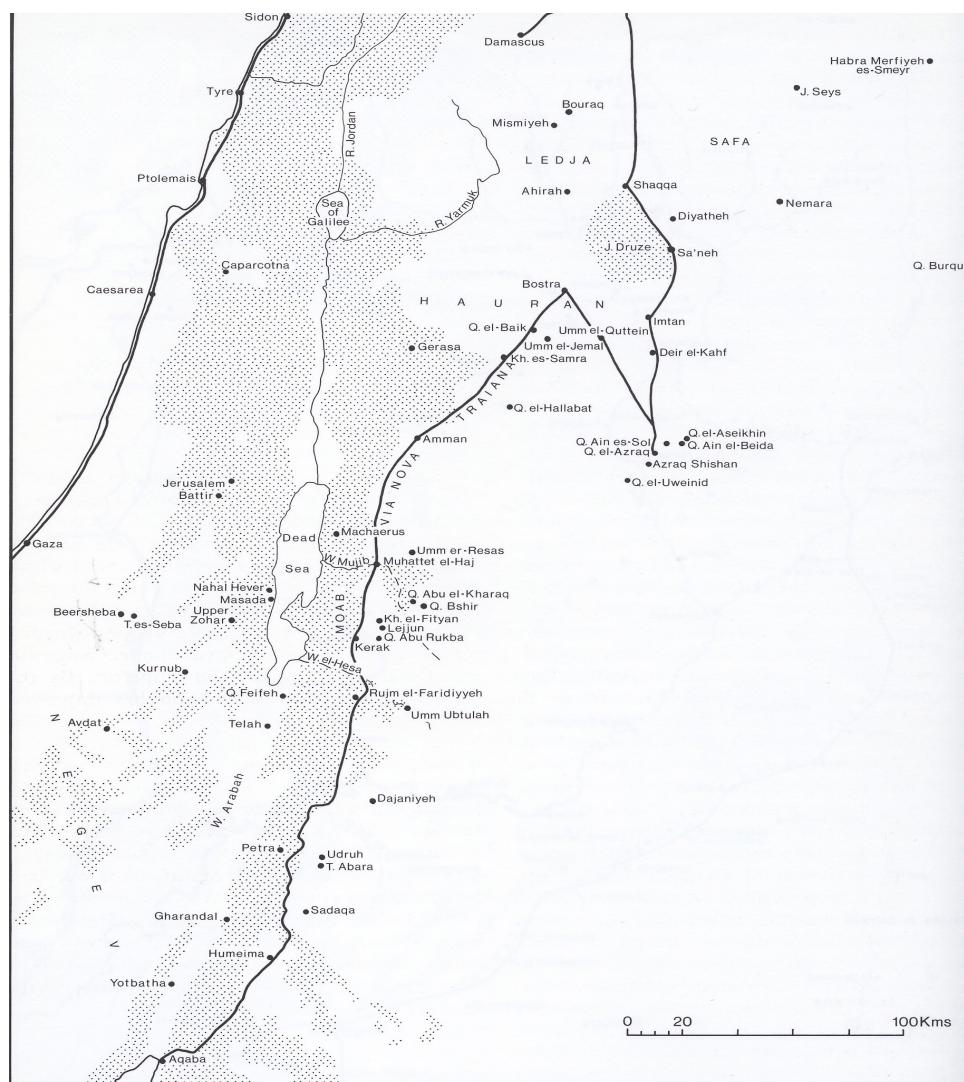have uncovered extensive new Roman copper mining projects from this era throughout the

Kerak plataeu.[32]

Figure 10: *Via Nova Traiana*

[32] A. Hauptmann, G. Weisgerber, "Periods of Ore Exploitation and Metal Production in the Area of Feinan, Wadi-Araba, Jordan," *SHAJ* 4 (1992), 61-66; A. Hauptmann, G. Weisgerber, "Archaeometallurgical and Mining-Archaeological Investigations in the Area of Feinan, Wadi-Arabah (Jordan)," *ADAJ* 31 (1987), 419-37; A. Hauptmann, "Archaeometallurgical and Mining-Archaeological Investigations in the Eastern Arabah, Feinan Area, 2nd Season," *ADAJ* 30 (1986), 415-19; B. Rothenberg, "Timna," in *The New Encyclopaedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land* (Jerusalem, 1993).

There was also an extensive network of secondary roads which were marked with Roman milestones, but it is unclear when and by whom they were constructed since, unlike those of the *via nova Traiana* itself, these milestones are uninscribed, as was customary for lesser roads.[33]

Figure 11: Milestones on *Via Nova Traiana*

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[33] Parker (2006), 534; Thomsen (1917), nos. 57-59.

Figure 12: *Via Nova Traiana*

One of these roads ran east of the *via nova Traiana* and parallel to it, with gaps in its course.[34]

Another road extended from Umm el-Walid from the *via nova Traiana* at Wadi Wala.[35] Yet

another road ran from north from Wadi el-Kharaze to the Roman fort of Qasr-eth-Thuraiya,

thence across the Wadi Mujib past the fort of Qasr el-Al and on to Qasr-Bshir.[36] Traces of roads

also linked other forts and watchtowers in the area, but generally lack milestones or any other

clues as to date or construction, as do the forts themselves.[37]

Despite the lack of details for date and construction, these roads clearly supported the

forts themselves and were constructed for military traffic rather than commercial. Indeed, as

Chevallier notes, when the Romans constructed roads along frontiers, it was usually for military

purposes rather than commerce.[38] Therefore, the road network in this region was a combination

of commercial and military routes, aimed at protecting commercial traffic itself and supporting

defensive actions against external threats, either nomads or the Parthians and later Persians, or

indeed nomads who were allied with these empires, as will be discussed in the chapter on the

nomadic element.

Other than these observations, there is very little other solid evidence for the exact nature

of Roman military dispositions east of the Dead Sea in the second and third centuries. Some

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[34] D.F. Graf, "The *Via Militaris* in Arabia," *DOP* 51 (1997), 271-81; D.F. Graf, "The *Via Militaris* and the *Limes Arabicus*," in *Roman Frontier Studies 1995: Proceedings of the XVIth International Congress of Frontier Studies*, G. Van Waaterine ed., (Oxford, 1997).

[35] R. Brünnow, A. von Domaszewski, *Die Provincia Arabia,* 3 vols. (Paris, 1904-09).

[36] Brünnow, A. von Domaszewski (1904-09), 45, 61-62.

[37] Brünnow, A. von Domaszewski (1904-09), 20-21, 23, 75, 79.

[38] R. Chevallier, *Roman Roads,* trans. N.H. Field (Berkeley, 1976), 202-10.

individual units are known, such as the *III Cyrenaica* stationed at Bostra, the provincial capital.[39]

Detachments of the legion were scattered throughout the immediate area. An example is the

fortress of Umm el-Quttein, located sixteen miles southeast of Bostra. The fort contains an altar

with an inscription of the *I (II) Cohort Augusta Thracum Equitata.*[40] A road fort south of Wadi

el-Hasa dates to this period as well.[41]

Examples from the late second century include Qasr el-Azraq, fifty miles wast of

Amman, which dates to the Severan period by virtue of milestones on the road leading to the fort

and associated structures.[42] A fort large enough to house a full auxiliary unit of the period has

been excavated at Humayma, and dates to the late second or third century by virtue of an

inscription of a *vexillatio* of the *III Cyrenaica.*[43] An increase in Severan milestones from 162

suggests either movements to reinforce in reparation for the Parthian campaign, or an increased

threat from nomads.[44]

All of these fortifications are located along the *via nova Traiana* itself, which implies that

during the time of Trajan through the second century, the main focus of defense was the road

itself and not the desert to the east. Only one possible piece of evidence suggests an attempt to

defend the interior desert during this period. This consists of a fort at Umm er-Risas, which is

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[39] M. Sartre, *Bostra: Des origines d'Islam* (Paris, 1985), 96-97; D. Kennedy, D. Riley, *Rome's Desert Frontier from the Air* (London, 1990), 124-25.

[40] Kennedy and Riley (1990), 143.

[41] MacDonald (1988), 212.

[42] Kennedy and Riley (1990), 109.

[43] J.P. Oleson, "Preliminary Report on the al-Humayma Excavation Project" *ADAJ* 43 (1999), 415.

[44] S.T. Parker (1986), 129-31; D. Kennedy, *Archaeological Explorations on the Roman Frontier in North-East Jordan*, BAR International Series 134 (Oxford, 1982).

located at a distance to the east of the *via nova Traiana*. It carries no direct evidence of date, but it is large enough to house one of the earlier auxiliary units and lacks the projecting towers of the later fourth century forts, of which there are numerous examples further into the desert interior.[45]
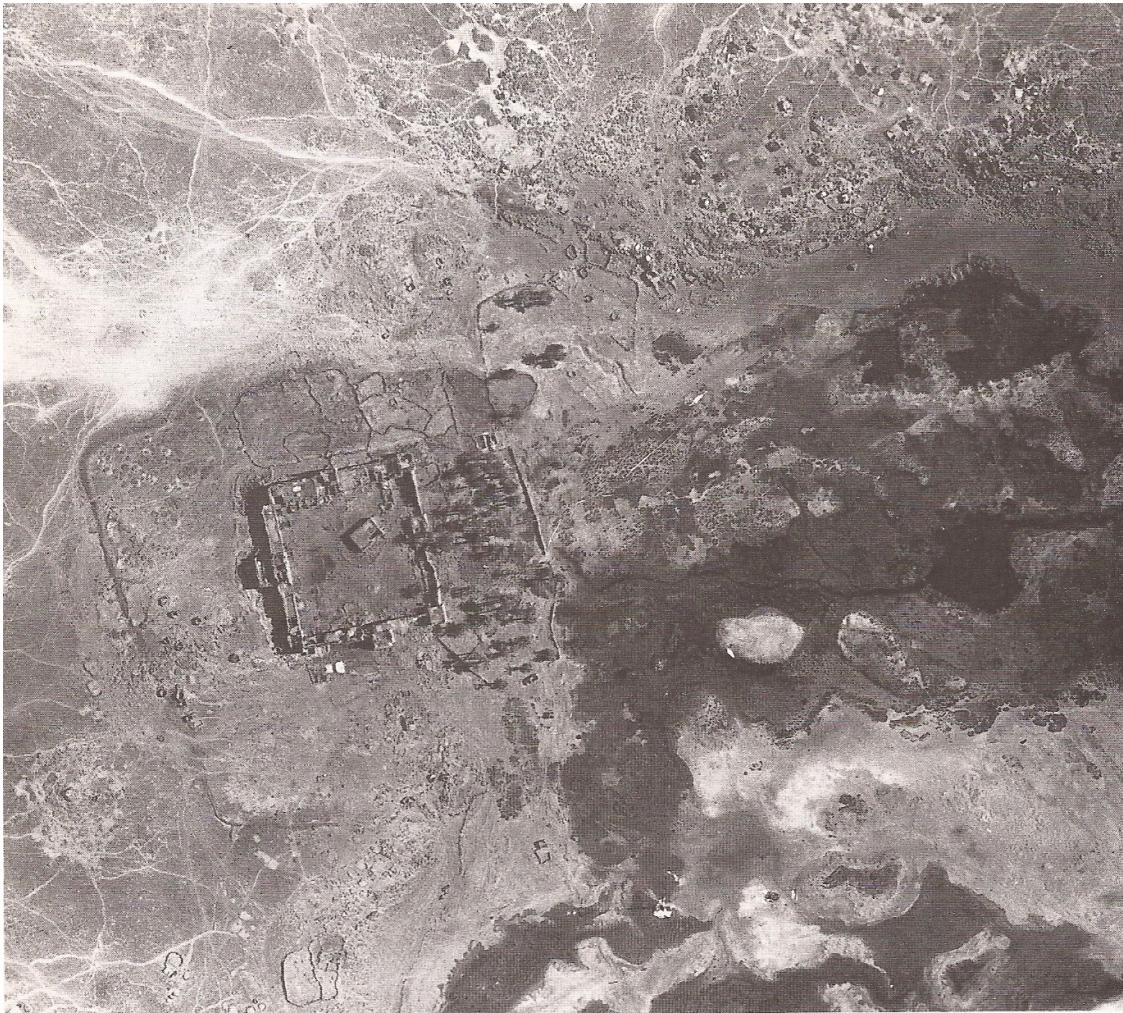

Figure 13: Qasr el-Azraq Aerial

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[45] Kennedy and Riley (1990), 189-93.

The Diocletianic Expansion

In the pre-Constantinian era, it is clear that emperors, in particular Diocletian, paid a great deal of attention to the defensive zone of Arabia. It is possible to date much new infrastructure, as well as many new and reinforced fortifications to the period from 288-305. The centerpiece of this effort was the *Strata Diocletiana,* a fortified road which ran along the limit of the desert from southern Syria to the Euphrates in the northeast.[46] This road was based on the foundation of existing roads such as the *via nova Traiana* expanded with sections of new construction and fortification.

The beginning of its construction is marked by a successful campaign of Diocletian against desert peoples called "saracens" in the source, which also refers to them as *"nationes* [peoples] of the borders of Syria.[47] This date of 290 for this campaign can be confirmed from tangential evidence on Dioletian's movements during this period, which place him in Emesa, Syria in May that year.[48] Another source remarks that Diocletian "established forts along the *limites* [frontiers] from Egypt up to the Persian frontier; he deployed soldiers in forts as *limitanei* [frontier troops] and he established duces [commanders] for each province . . . He also erected *stelae* [markers] with the names of Augustus and Caesar on the *limes* of Syria."[49]

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[46] Parker (2006), 542; D.F. Graf, "The Origins of the Nabataeans" *Aram* 2 (1990), 45-75; J.F. Healey, "Were the Nabataeans Arabs?," *Aram* 1 (1989), 38-44; E.A. Knauf, "Die Herkunft der Nabatäer," *Petra: Neue Ausgrabungen und Entdeckungen,* M. Lindner, ed. (Munich, 1986), 83-84; J.T. Milik, "Origines des nabatéens," *Studies in the History and Geography of* Jordan (*SHAJ*) 1 (1982), 261-65; J. Starcky, "Petra et la Nabatène," *Supplément au Dictionnaire de la Bible* 7 (1964), 886-1017.

[47] *Panegyrici Latini*, 11.5.4 7.1.

[48] T.D. Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine* (Cambridge, MA, 1982), 51.

[49] John Malalas, *Chronographia,* 12.307-8.
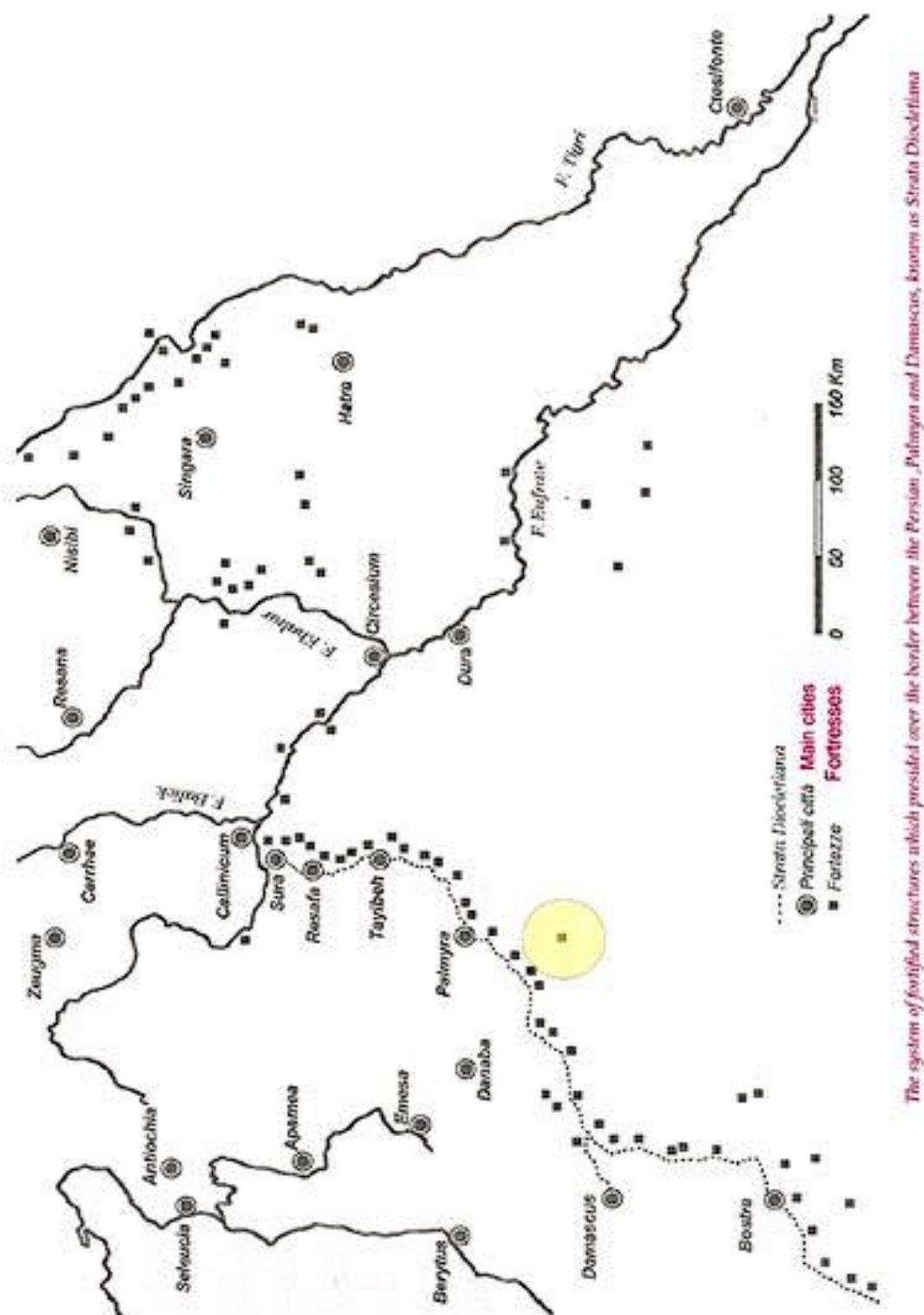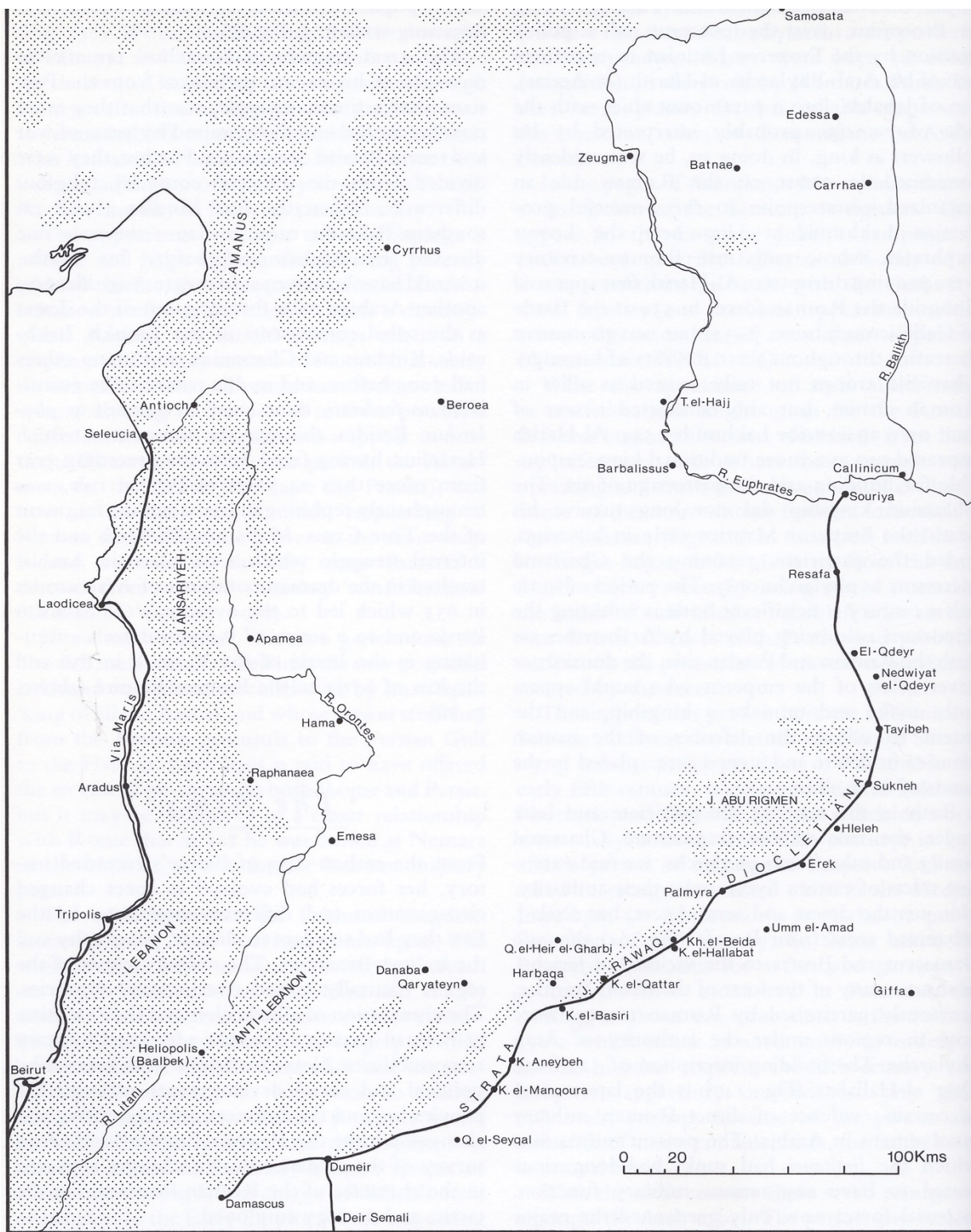
Figure 14: *Strata Diocletiana*

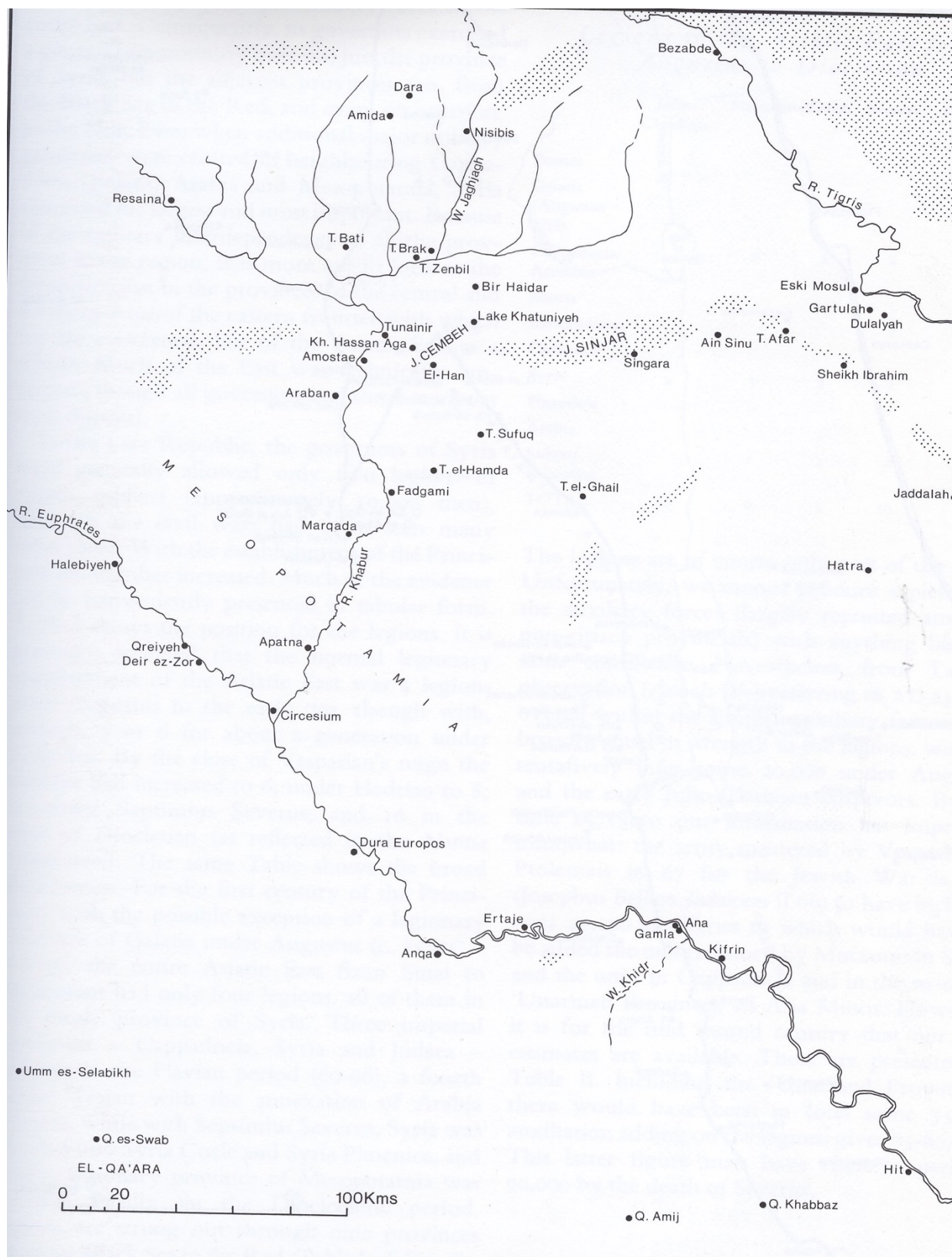Figure 15: NW *Strata Diocletiana*

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Figure 16: NE *Strata Diocletiana*

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The *stelae* of Malalas refer to the milestones of the roads. Some of them indicate repairs to existing roads as early as 288, before Diocletian's campaign. For example, milestones on the Esbus-Jericho road date its construction to Caracalla in 213 and Elegabalus in 219, with further work in 271 under Aurelian and 288 under Diocletian and Maximian.[50]. Other milestones indicate new construction or repair of the *via nova Traiana* and other existing roads under the first and second tetrarchies.[51]

The inscriptions of existing milestones of the road system in Arabia consist only of the imperial nomenclature and perhaps the name of the immediate legate who supervised construction of the road. Thus, they have some potential propaganda value, but no more than one would expect in light of the normal custom throughout the empire of attributing new construction to the emperor of the moment.

This revitalized and expanded infrastructure supported a number of new fortifications. However, although much of the construction was new at the time, most of it served to strengthen defensive lines which previous emperors had already established. The fortress at Deir el-Kahf (Jordan) is among such examples. The fort is dated to 306 from Latin inscriptions.[52] However, the site is situated adjacent to a road which may date from the Severan period. Covering an area of only 0.36 ha./0.89 acres, the fort had two stories which consisted of quarters for approximately 400-500 infantry and stables for a limited number of livestock.[53] As will be

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[50] Thomsen (1917), Nos. 125 [five milestones], 230.

[51] Thomsen (1917), Nos. 92-93, 116, 118, 119, 134, 143, 186; S. Mittman, "Die römische Straße von Gerasa nach Adraa," *ZDPV* 74 (1964), 113-36; D. Kennedy, "Two New Latin Inscriptions from Jordan-1976," *Annual of the Department of Antiquities Jordan* (*ADAJ*) 21 (1976), 135-37.

[52] Identified as such by the presence of mangers, it is impossible to note whether these were intended for horses, donkeys, camels, etc. The small number indicates that this was not a cavalry installation. See Kennedy and Riley (1990), 169.

[53] Kennedy and Riley (1990), 181.

discussed further below, the relatively small size of the fort underscores the much-reduced unit

sizes of the Diocletianic period, and of Arabia particularly. The relatively small number of

livestock stalls within the fort is also notable, since it indicates that these units were not heavily

supported by cavalry. In fact, we have no indication that there were even horses there at all. They

could have been for cattle, pigs, oxen, etc. The fact that the fort was built on a Severan road

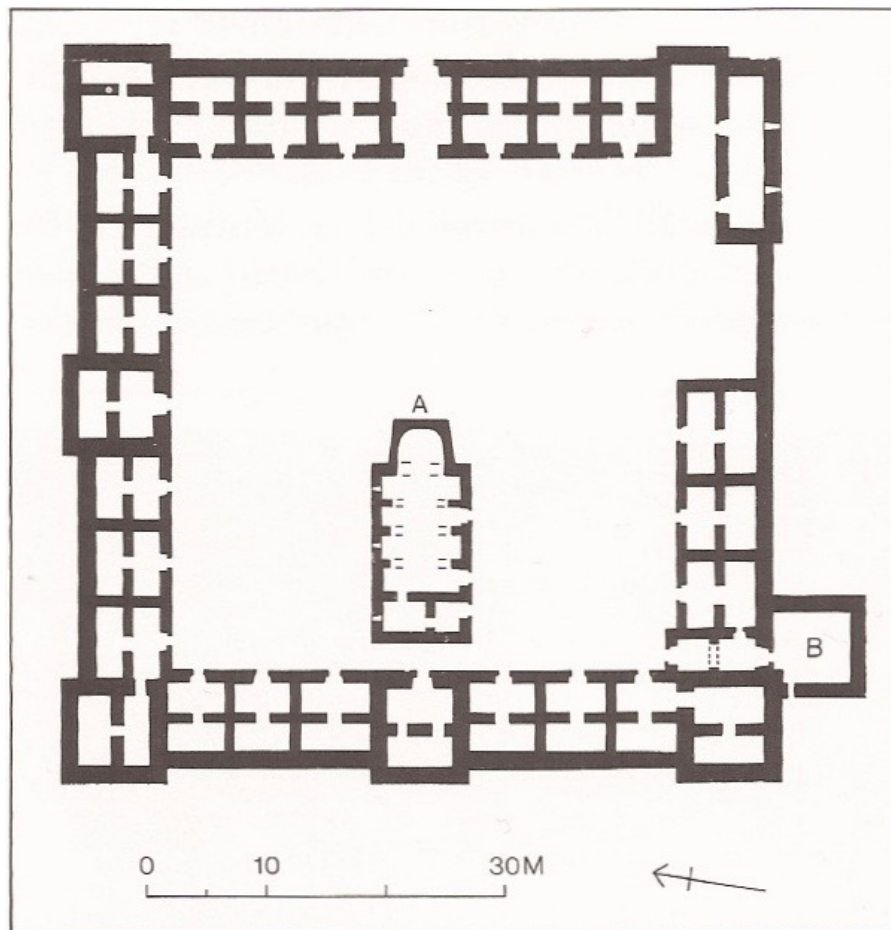indicates the reinforcement or restoration of existing lines.
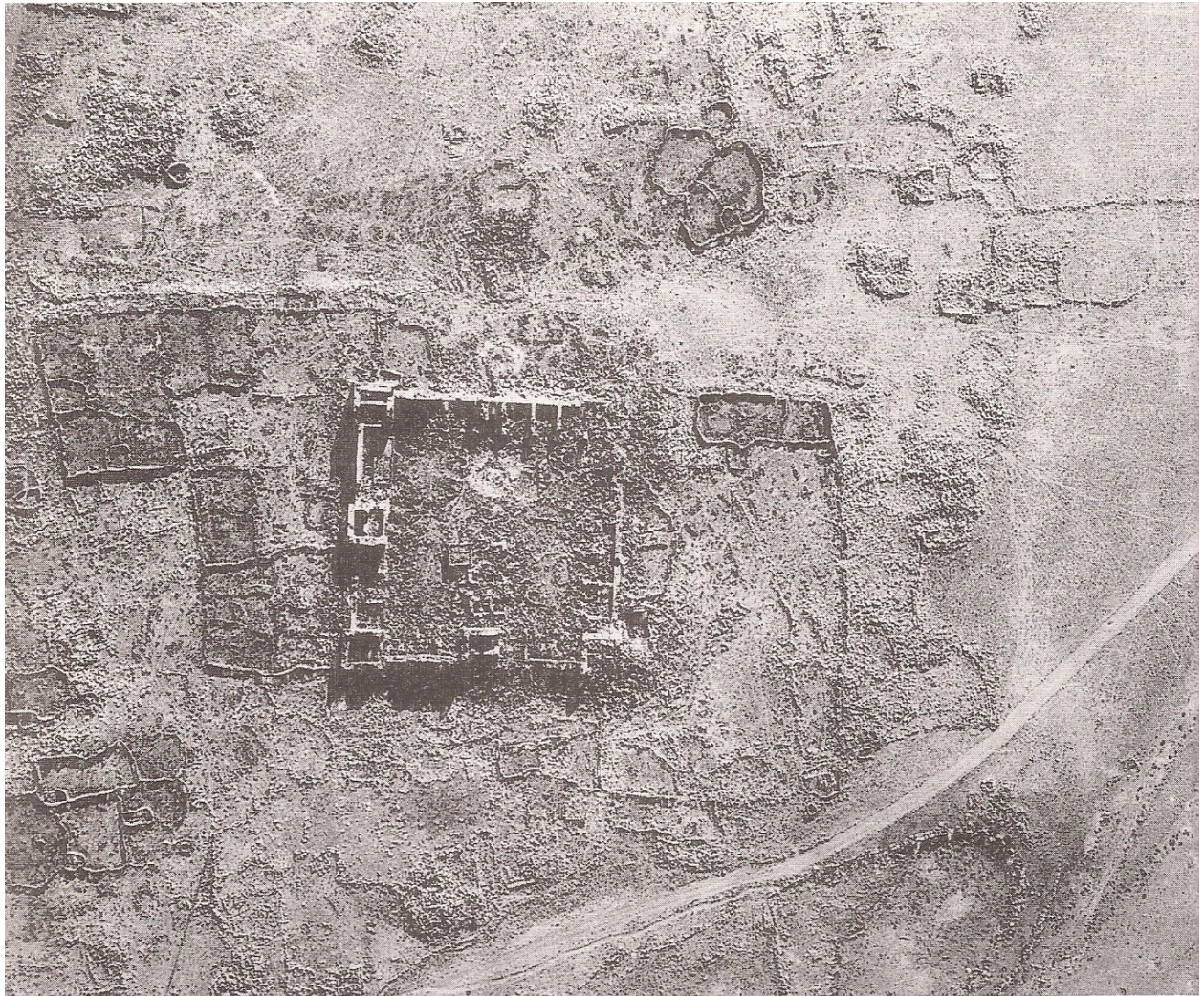

Figure 17: Deir el-Kahf Plan

Figure 18: Deir el-Kahf Aerial

Such is the case with the aforementioned Qasr el-Azraq, a sister fortification, by size, plan and date, which supports these conclusions. This installation was no doubt guarding what remains a key oasis of the Syrian Desert. The fort was slightly larger than Deir el-Kahf, with an area of 0.57 ha./1.4 acres.[54] Inscriptions, including those on an altar of Diocletian and Maximian and two other buildings,[55] as well as pottery fragments[56] date the fort, but, like Deir el-Kahf, the earliest fortifications and developments in the area date at least to the Severan period,[57] thus underscoring the fact that these were not new defensive lines under Diocletian, just strengthened ones.

The more recently discovered fort within the key frontier town of Umm el-Jimal, located between Bostra and Deir el-Kahf (southern Jordan), follows the trend of the above two examples. The earliest Roman fortification dates to the late second century as evidenced by an inscription from the reign of the emperor Commodus (180-92) referring to an *opus valli*, or 'rampart work'. Once again, Diocletian augmented existing fortifications with the construction of a new *castellum* in the late 3rd century.[58] This small fort occupies an area of 1 ha./2.47 acres, again placing it in the same class as other constructions of this period. The site at Umm al-Jimal is not just an isolated structure, but part of a rather extensive town.

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[54] Kennedy and Riley (1990), 181.

[55] Parker (1986), 20.

[56] Kennedy and Riley (1990), 181.

[57] De Vries (1998), 227.

[58] Location: 18km/11 mi. NE of el-Lejjun; area 0.31 ha./0.78 acres. Two stories with ground floor rooms used as stables sufficient for c. 69 horses, etc., thus making it suitable for a squadron of cavalry. An earlier Nabatean tower originally occupied the site. A Latin inscription above the main gate gives the name of the fort as *Castra Praetorii Mobeni* and records that it was built as a new construction by a certain Aurelius Asclepiades, governor of Arabia from 293-305. See Kennedy and Riley (1990), 176.

Figure 19: Umm el-Jimal Aerial: Shows relationship between late-antique town and 1st – 4th century village.
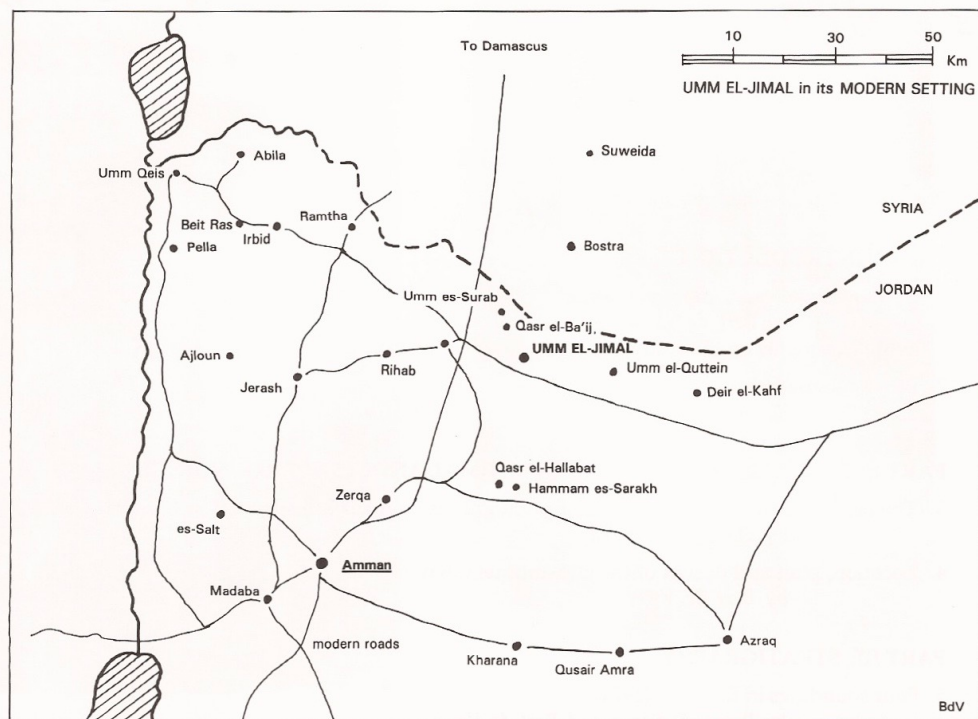
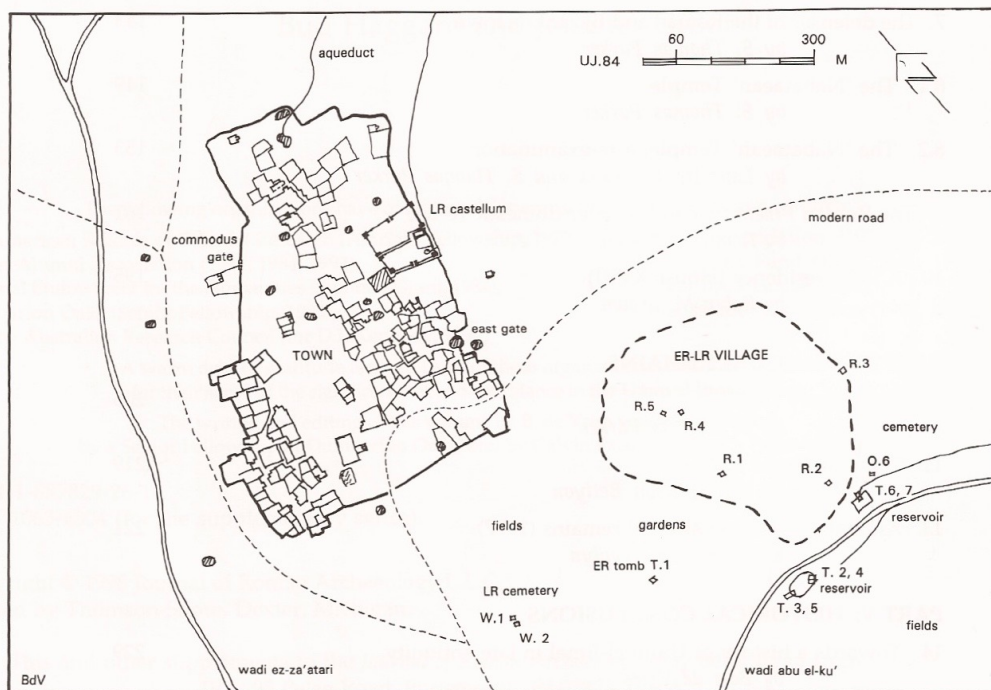Fig. 1. Regional context of Umm el-Jimal (B. de Vries).

Fig. 2a. Map showing relationship between the late antique town and the 1st-4th c. (ER-LR) village (B. de Vries and R. Sayyegh).

Figure 20: Umm el-Jimal Regional Context

Umm el-Jimal began as a Nabataean settlement, which is attested by numerous funerary inscriptions at the site, as well as pottery shards dating from the mid 1st to early 2nd centuries.[59] However, no structures exist from the period, perhaps having been destroyed by later levels of construction. Roman occupation as a military/administrative center began as early as the late 2nd century as evidenced by a gate inscription dedicated to the emperor Commodus,[60] followed by the construction of a *praetorium* and additional enclosure walls in the 3rd century.[61]
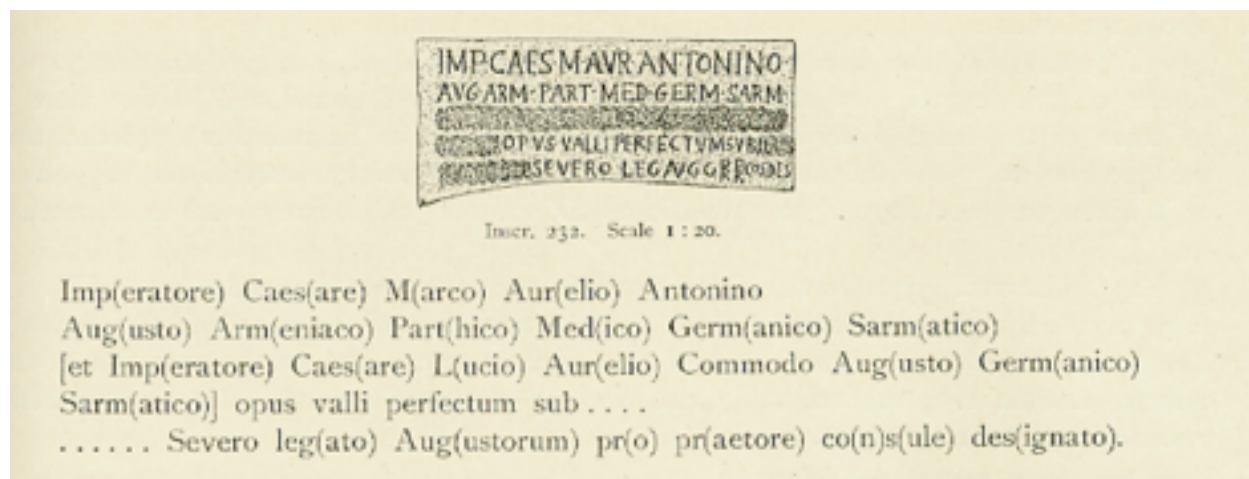

Figure 21: Dedicatory inscription for fortification gate (PAES 3.232)
Date: 177-80

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[59] De Vries (1998), 153.

[60] De Vries (1998), 229.

[61] De Vries (1998), 229.

This phase corresponds with the assumption of direct control by the Romans following the annexation of Arabia by Trajan in 106, before which it was administered as a Roman client kingdom under the Nabataeans. A civilian village which predated Roman occupation existed a short distance from the fort, lasting from the 1st- early 4th centuries, when the record ceases, perhaps due to the great regional upheavals during the rebellion of Palmyra, which the town didn't survive.[62] At that same time, new military construction began at the site in the form of a smaller tetrarchic *castellum*. The site remained exclusively official until into the 4th century, as evidenced by the construction of a *burgus* by the *equites IX Dalmatae.* This small tetrarchic fort was a self-contained military structure, unassociated with any civilian function or presence. This *castellum* was abandoned sometime in the 4th century, probably due to the peace Theodosius made with Persia in 384/7.[63]

No evidence exists to support a local civilian population at Umm el-Jimal during the 4th century, other than those supplying services to the troops. However, such evidence may have been lost to later Umayyad period buildings which tended to supercede and replace lower levels during their construction.[64] Thus, the evidence suggests that from the beginning of Roman occupation until the end of the 4th century, Umm el-Jimal was exclusively military (castellum), or administrative (*Praetorium*) in character. Also, during this period there is evidence of religious building at Umm el-Jimal, which is variously pagan and Christian in orientation. The first of these is the so-called 'Nabataean' temple, at first thought to have dated to the Nabataean

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[62] De Vries (1998), 229.

[63] De Vries (1998), 230-31.

[64] De Vries (1998), 230.

period, but later reassigned to the 3rd century. The design is in the category of Roman temples in the region, by virtue of its triple-doorways. It also apparently housed a pagan cult, though the exact deity is unknown.[65] The second case is a Christian funerary inscription which attests the existence of 'public cemetery of the people of Christ' sometime before the mid-4th century in the immediate area of Umm el-Jimal, the earliest evidence of a Christian presence a the site.[66] Evidence elsewhere suggests that Christianity had spread to S. Syria and Arabia by the mid to late 3rd century.[67] More discussion of how these fit into the local faith picture at Umm el-Jimal will follow in the section on religion below.

A major shift in the character of Umm el-Jimal came in the early 5th century with the building of a new, larger tetrarchic *castellum*. This fort, unlike the earlier, integrated military with domestic functions.[68] This could be evidence for a reduced military presence during this period, including the transition to *limitanei*. Although there is little evidence for a practical distinction between *limitanei* and regular troops prior to the 5th century, especially in the east, they had become a common fixture in frontier outposts by then.[69] For Umm el-Jimal, this scenario accords with a law of 423 to the praetorian prefect of the east prohibiting any other than soldiers stationed there (*castellani milites)* from occupying the land of the *castella*.[70] This is

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[65] De Vries (1998), 160.

[66] De Vries (1998), 230.

[67] De Vries (1998), 160.

[68] De Vries (1998), 231.

[69] Roman troops stationed permanently or semi-permanently on the frontiers who also cultivate land for their sustenance, rather than relying on the standard ration in kind. See A.H.M. Jones, *The Later Roman Empire, 284-602: A Social, Economic and Administrative Survey,* Vol. I (Norman, OK, 1964), 647ff.

[70] *Codex Theodosianus,* vii. xv. 2.423: "quicumque castellorum loca quocumque titulo possident, cedant ac deserant, quia ab his tantum fas est possideri castellorum territoria, quibus adscripta sunt et de quibus iudicavit

further confirmed by a law of 443 to Nomus, Master of Offices for the east, implementing a reform of the *limitanei*, again restating that lands of the *castelli* (*agri limitanei*) are not to be ceded to non-official personnel.[71] So, there is a good probability that those working the agricultural lands at Umm el-Jimal in the 5th century were in fact the soldiers themselves, either active or veterans, and this accords with the dual military/domestic character of the 5th century *castellum*. However, the fact that the prohibition of lands to non-official personnel is mentioned specifically in these two laws may also indicate that lands were *indeed* being occupied and cultivated by civilians. This was certainly the case later in the 5th century as evidenced in the archaeological record.

By the late 5th- early 6th century, domestic building began to increase in pace, integrating and replacing the earlier military/administrative construction. A domestic house and a church were built into part of the abandoned 3rd century *castellum*. Part of the 5th century *castellum* was converted to domestic use at the same time. Similarly, the 'Nabataean' temple was pushed into domestic use as well.[72] These developments were part of general population boom at the site from the late 5th-6th centuries, when Umm el-Jimal reached its greatest extent and prosperity, attaining the size of a formally chartered city. Ironically, this boom coincided with the decline and eventual end of Roman imperial control by the end of Justinian's reign in 565.[73]

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antiquitas. quod si fuerit detentator inventus, capitali sententia cum bonorum publicatione plectatur." See also Jones, 653.

[71] *Codex Theodosianus,* ii, *Nov.* xxiv 4.443: "agros etiam limitaneos universis cum paludibus vacuos ipsi curare pro suo compendio atque arare consueverant, et si in et si ab aliis possidentur, cuiuslibet spatii temporis praescriptione cessante ab universis detentoribus vindicatos isdem militibus sine ullo prorsus, sicut antiquitus statuum est, conlationis onere volumus adsignari." See Jones (1964), 653-54.

[72] De Vries (1998), 231.

[73] De Vries (1998), 232.

In sum, the archaeological record at Umm el-Jimal indicates a military/administrative foundation gradually becoming more and more domestic in character as the empire aged, and finally reaching its peak and greatest success as a large civilian town at the end of imperial control. Thus, the experience of Umm el-Jimal further belies the theory that the 'decline' of the Roman empire necessarily coincided with the decline of the city as one of its symptoms.

How then does this picture of Umm el-Jimal fit into the larger archaeological context of the late antique frontier in the region? First, the fact that Umm el-Jimal is so dramatically well-preserved in comparison to its contemporary neighbors may lead to the conclusion that it held some special place on the frontier. However, it is more accurate to see the site as but one of many such rural towns along the trade route from S. Arabia into Syria. Some of these towns were even of similar size, such as Umm el-Quttein.[74] In military terms, its context is as one of many forts along the *Strata Diocletiana*, discussed in the chapter above. The successive tetrarchic *castella* at the site date the peak of its military/administrative role to this period. However, one should note that a civilian presence still existed in the immediate vicinity of the site during the peak of the military era, both in the form of the nearby 1st-4th century village, and of nomads, discussed further below. Evidence for the integration of military with domestic architecture in the 5th century fort points to the decline of central control and ceding of this control to the hybrid civilian/military *limitanei*, or perhaps veterans. These in turn provide the basis for the gradual transformation of the site into a flourishing civilian city in the 6th century.

In the larger political/economic scheme, Umm el-Jimal fit into a network of heirarchies in region based on size and regional importance.[75] The central hub of this heirarchy was the

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[74] De Vries (1998), 232.

[75] De Vries (1998), 232.

provincial capital of Bostra itself.[76] Officially Bostra would be a primary distribution hub for

regional agricultural products, as well as for trade goods originating from outside the region.

Medium-sized towns such as Umm el-Jimal could be seen as performing the same role at the

secondary level, as did the smallest villages at the lowest level. Excavations around the region

indicate a flourishing network of towns in the 6th century, such as Umm er-Rasas in the region

of Madaba. Such prosperity extends beyond domestic architecture to religious as well, with the

number of church foundations multiplying during this era.[77]

The larger picture from the E. Mediterranean coast to the desert shows a corresponding

boom across the 6th century.[78] Again, this boom coincides with the decline and end of imperial

control. Indeed, there is scant evidence for links between the local and the larger empire during

the period. At Umm el-Jimal, exceptions are limited to a single instance of graffiti referencing

popular politics at Rome, 'Conquer, fortune to the Blues!'[79] In terms of Umm el-Jimal, it is

possible to study this shift from the imperial to local in detail by looking at the development of

relations with Bostra across the various phases of settlement at the site. For example, epigraphy

in the 1st-4th century village shows a clear linguistic/cultural connection with the provincial

capital Bostra. Also, as will be discussed further below, there is a religious connection with

Bostra by virtue of an altar dedicated to Dushara, a cult associated with the capital. Further, a

political connection is evidenced by the membership of three residents of Umm el-Jimal on the

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[76] I.W.J. Hopkins, "The City Region in Roman Palestine," *PEQ* 112 (1980), 19-32; de Vries (1998), 232.

[77] De Vries (1998), 232-33.

[78] A. Cameron, *The Mediterranean World in Late Antiquity, AD 395-600* (New York, 1993), 177-80.

[79] De Vries (1998), 233.

city council of Bostra, as indicated on their tombstones.[80] Finally, the increase in the number of churches into the 6th century indicates the increasing shift of resources to the level of the diocese (Bostra) rather than the curia, as common in the earlier periods.[81]

Changes in the way the economy of Rome is understood are important for creating the frontier as center model at Umm el-Jimal. The old view, exemplified by Rostovtzeff and Pirenne, asserted that the economy of the empire was a factor of the production and movement of goods between great urban centers, in short, at the macro-level.[82] Such a view places greater emphasis on luxury goods, and thereby ignores how most people lived, which is at the level of local production, and at the subsistence level.[83] Here newer models which center the local economy come into play.[84] At Umm el-Jimal, archaeology provides evidence for a strong agrarian economy, both of animals and crops. There is a prevalence of stables and corrals at the site and the surrounding area contains traces of agricultural fields and associated irrigation earthworks. Basalt grain grinders have been found in houses at the site, though no evidence of long-term storage facilities.[85]

Considering its place on the caravan route from Mecca to Bostra, the local agrarian economy probably worked in combination with support for long distance trade. Indeed, as

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[80] De Vries (1998), 234-35.

[81] P.R.L. Brown, *Power and Persuasion in Late Antiquity: Towards a Christian Empire* (Madison, 1992), 89-103; de Vries (1998), 235.

[82] M. Rostoftzeff, *Caravan cities* (Oxford, 1932); H. Pirenne, *Mohammad and Charlemagne* (New York, 1937).

[83] De Vries (1998), 236.

[84] M.I. Finley, *The Ancient Economy,* Second Edition (Berkeley, 1973); R. MacMullen, *Roman Social Relations, 50 B.C. to A.D. 284* (New Haven, 1974); E. Patlagean, *Pauvrete economique et pauvrete sociale a Byzance, 4e-7e siecles* (Paris, 1977); de Vries (1998), 236.

[85] De Vries (1998), 239.

already mentioned, the name of the city itself implies a connection with camels. Further, Umm el-Jimal's noted connections with the nomadic population and confederacies may be seen in this light, as will be discussed at length below. Thus, the economy of Umm el-Jimal must be seen as the product of a complex web consisting of local farming and livestock production, long distance trade and as a point of exchange with the nomadic peoples of the interior desert. At any rate, evidence for great local prosperity at Umm el-Jimal in the 6th century tends to work for the hypothesis that when the imperial presence was strong, the local was subsumed, and when the imperial presence waned, the local emerged more strongly.

Epigraphical dating adds several other forts throughout Jordan and Syria to those of Diocletianic origin, including Qasr Bshir[86] (293-305),[87] one 40k north of Aqaba at Yotvata (293-305),[88] and mention of the construction of a fort in an inscription discovered at el-Qantara in Sinai (288).[89]

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[86] V.A. Clark, 'The Roman *Castellum* of Qasr Bashir', in Parker (1987), 457-95. This fort is really just a small post. Its construction is dated from a Tetrarchic inscription at the site. See Z. Meshel, I. Roll, "Yotvateh," *Eretz Israel* 19 (1987), 249-62; for coins and pottery see B. Rothenburg, "The Arabah in Roman and Byzantine Times in the Light of New Research," *Roman Frontier Studies,* S. Applebaum, ed. (Tel Aviv, 1967), 217ff.

[87] W. Eck, *Alam Costia Constituerunt,* Zum Verstandis einer Militarinschrift aus dem sudichen Negev. *Klio* 74 (1992), 395-400; Z. Meshel, "Yotvata," *The New Encyclopaedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land* (Jerusalem, 1993), 1517-20.

[88] *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum,* consilio et auctoritate Academiae litterarum regiae borussicae editum, Vol. 3 (*Inscriptiones Asiae*), 133.

[89] The fortresses at Bostra and Singara are classic examples of full-scale legionary bases. They were the largest fortifications of the East, which reflects their construction and importance from earlier imperial times. See Kennedy and Riley (1990), 131. Bostra served as a major administrative and commercial link in the Nabatean kingdom and was situated on the Wadi al-Sirhan trade route. Trajan (98-117) declared Bostra capital of the province of Arabia, strengthened its fortifications and stationed *Legio III Cyrenaica* there, *Oxford Classical Dictionary,* Fourth Edition., S. Hornblower, A. Spawforth, eds., (Oxford, 2012), 254. The fort itself has an area of 16.8 ha./41.5 acres. Trajan first captured Singara, a city in northern Mesopotamia, in 114. Later it became the base of *Legio I Parthica* under Septimius Severus (193-211). (*OLD,* 1412) The fort has an area of 17 ha./42 acres. Both of these fortresses were built to house the much larger full legions characteristic of the earlier periods. The strength of such legions was 4000-5000 troops, at least four times larger than largest garrison units of the late period discussed herein.
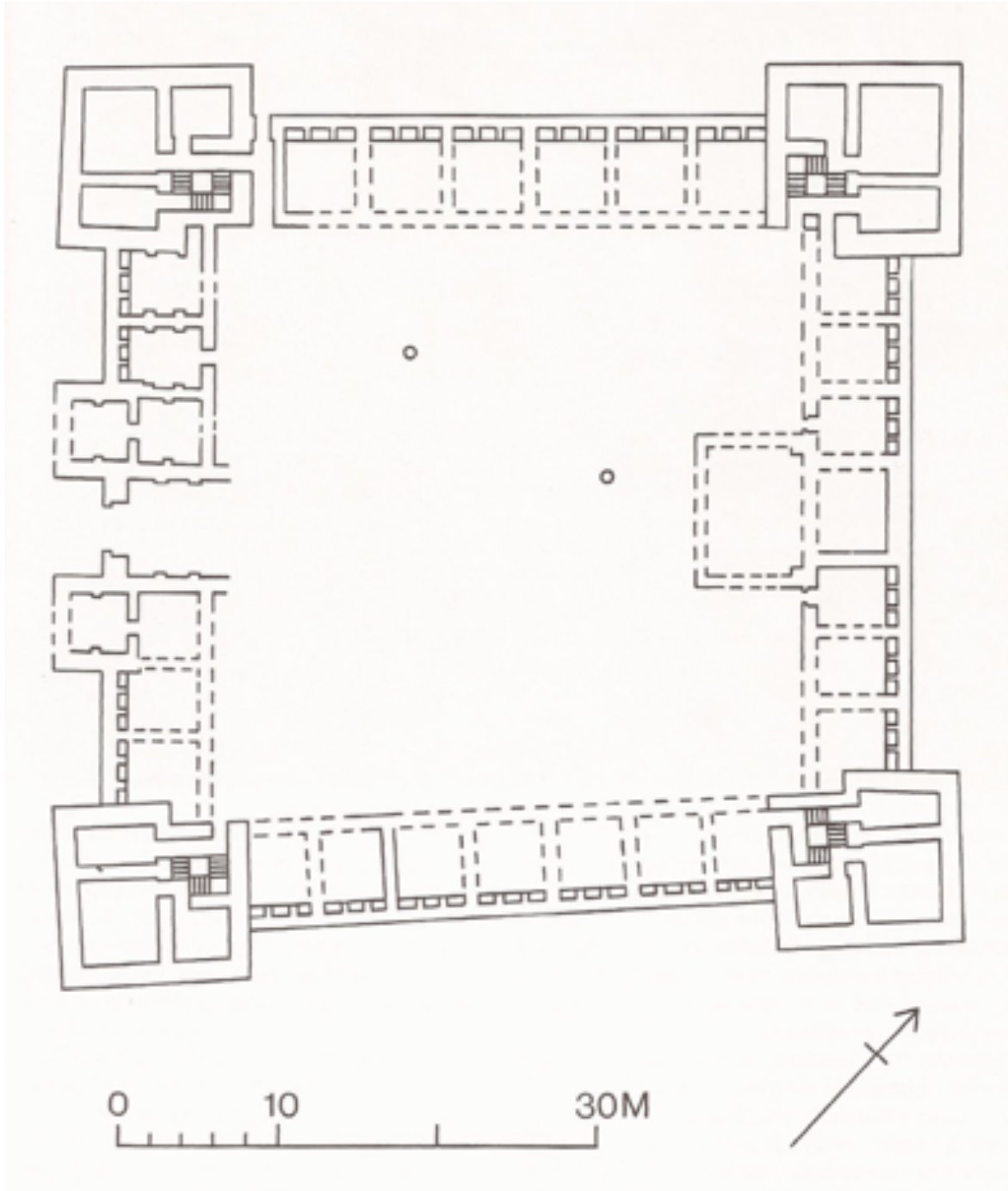
Figure 22: Qasr el-Bshir

Figure 23: Qasr el-Bshir Aerial

Many important forts, though lacking epigraphic evidence, date to the Diocletianic period through excavation. Among the most important of these sites is the impressive fortress at El-Lejjun, Jordan. While not the largest fortress of the east,[90] it is among the largest, covering an area of 4.6 ha/11.4 acres. Construction is dated to 300. Although larger than the class of forts discussed cited above, which had barracks for c. 400-500 troops, this fortress could have housed a unit of c. 1000, again quite small compared to earlier foundations.[91]
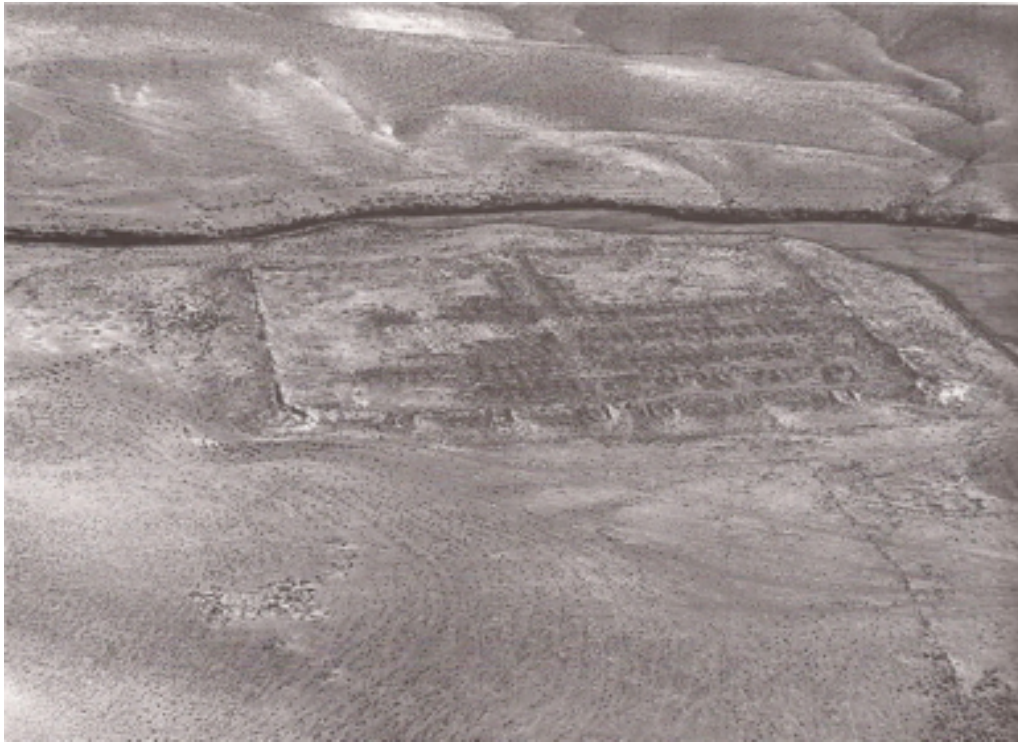
Figure 24: El-Lejjun Aerial

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[90] Kennedy and Riley (1990), 131.

[91] Kennedy and Riley (1990), 173.
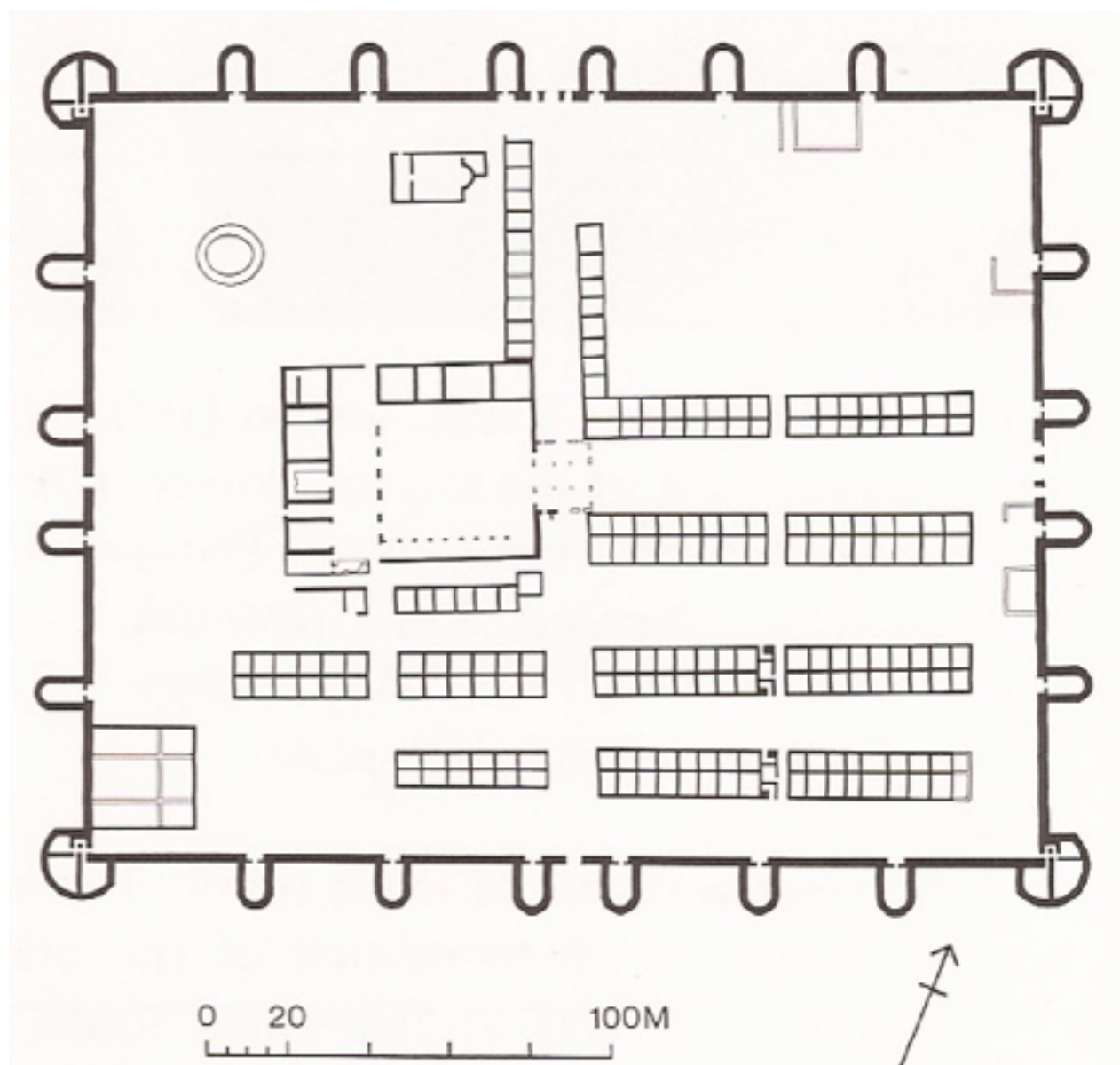
Figure 25: El-Lejjun Plan

Of strikingly similar size and construction, but uncertain date is the fortress at Udruh, Jordan. With an area of 4.7 ha./11.6 acres, it is nearly identical in size to El-Lejjun. It also has the same u-shaped protruding towers along its length. Nothing exists on the site to allow positive dating of this structure to Diocletian, but the fact that such a fort accommodated a unit of c. 1000-1500 troops makes it too small for either an auxiliary or legionary unit of an earlier period. Instead it accords with the evidence for unit strengths during the Diocletianic and later periods. It could therefore have been constructed *after* Diocletian.
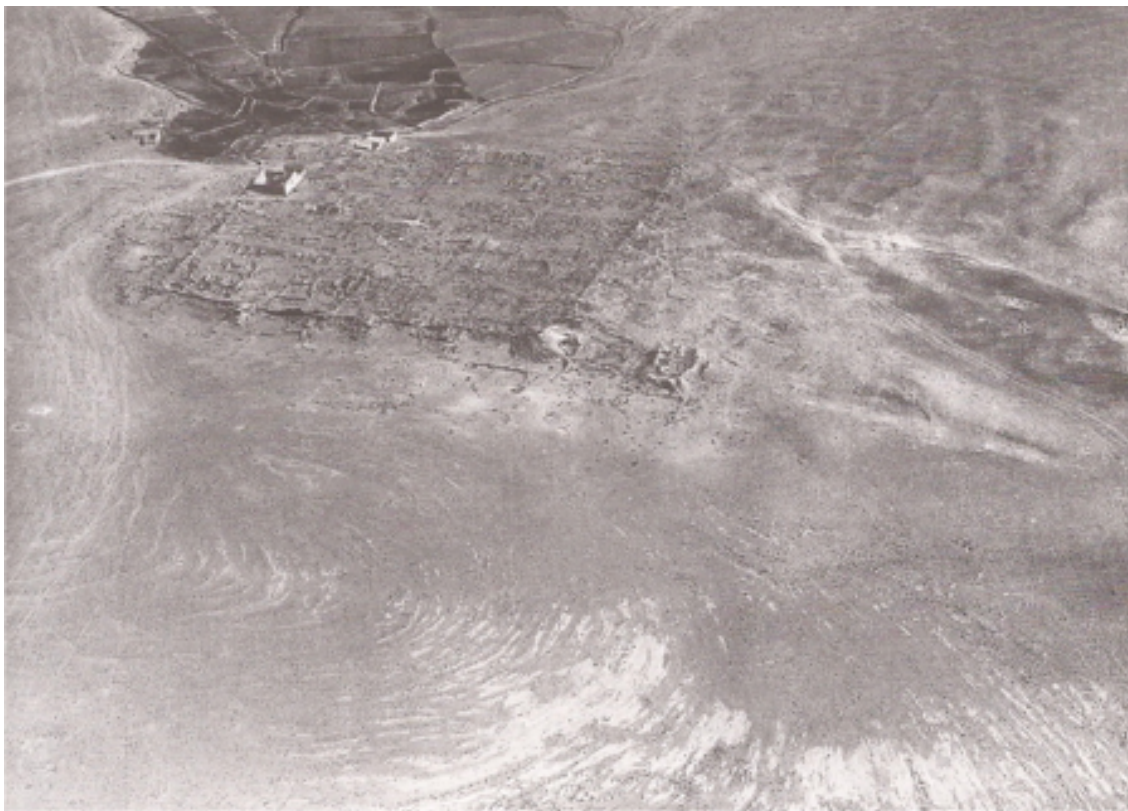
Figure 26: Udruh Aerial
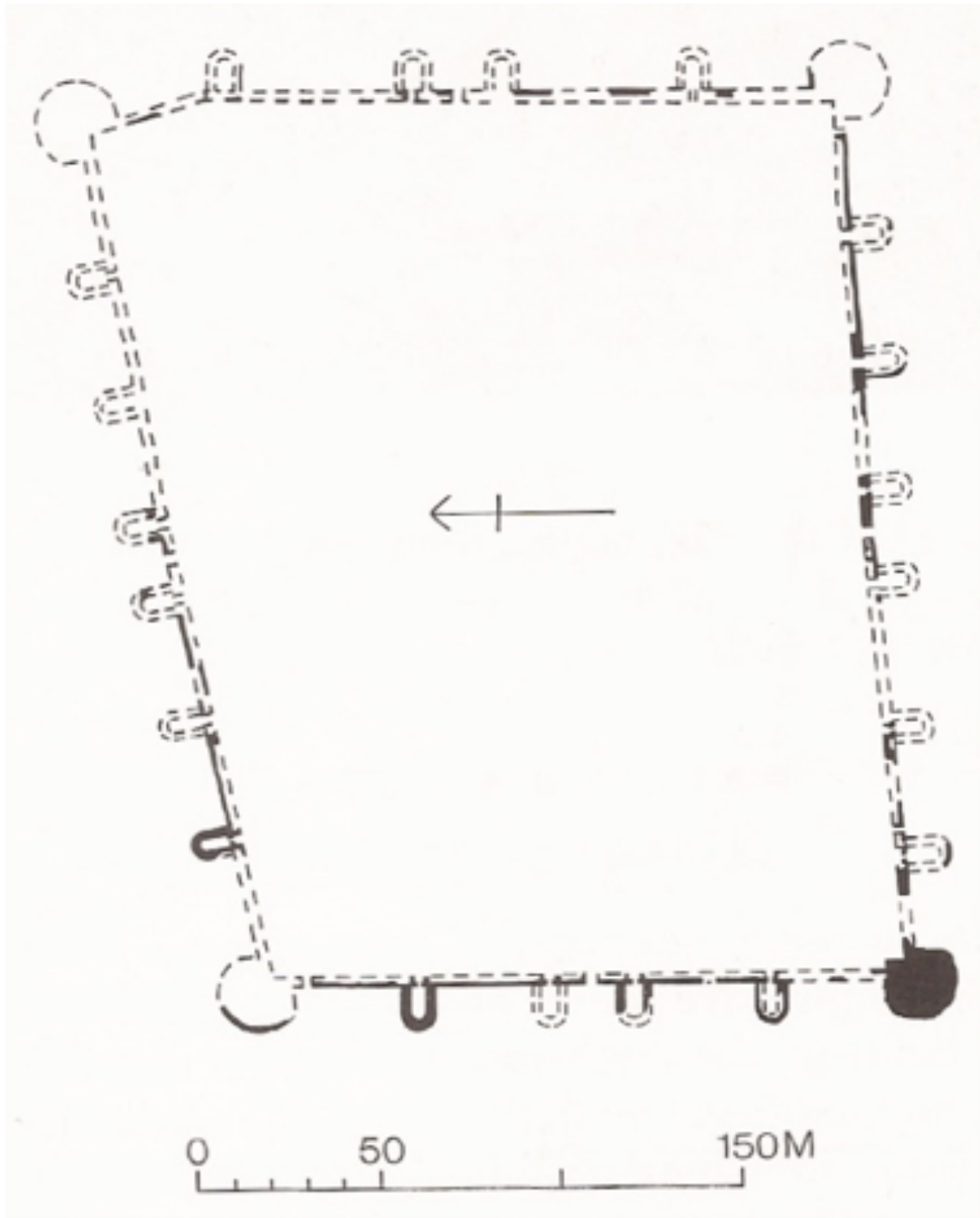
Figure 27: Udruh Plan

A final example of interest is what appears to be a dedicated cavalry base at Da'ajaniya, Jordan. This fort had an area of 1 ha./2.47 acres, which is similar many of the other infantry forts of this period. But, there is extensive stabling inside the fort, such that it could have accommodated a couple of squadrons of cavalry along with some infantry for a total of about 300 troops.[92] The fort is unexcavated and no known inscriptions exist, but a coin dated to 308-9 was discovered during a surface survey.[93] Thus, this fort may represent the transitional period between Diocletian and Constantine.

Figure 28: Da'ajaniya Aerial

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[92] Kennedy and Riley (1990), 173.

[93] Parker (2006), 542.
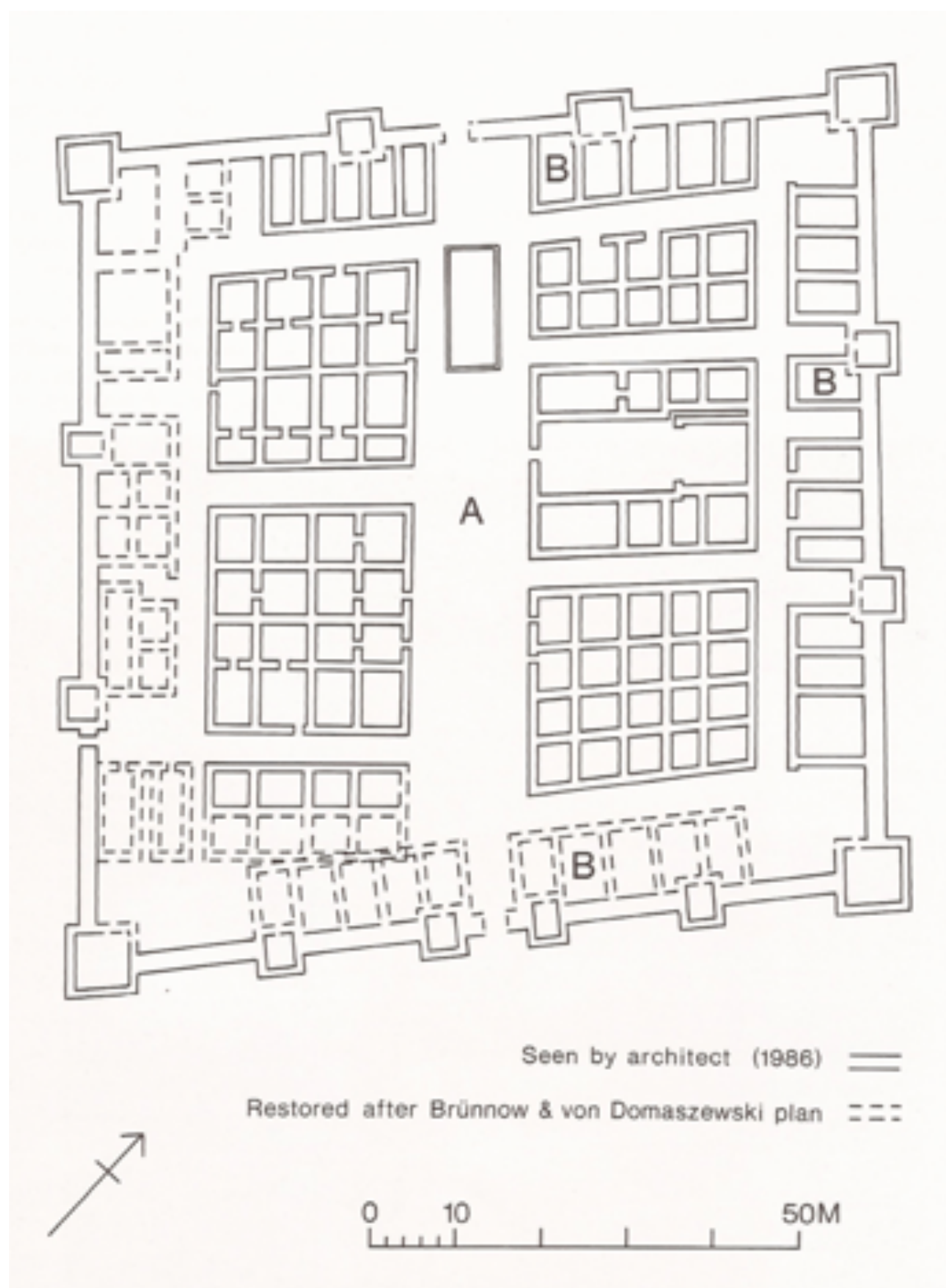
Figure 29: Da'ajaniya Plan

Figure 30: Da'ajaniya

The relatively small numbers of troops stationed in the forts and their location primarily along the main road itself speak to the defense of the road and its traffic. This interpretation is confirmed by the late fourth century *Itinerarium Egeria*, in which Egeria, a Christian woman on pilgrimmage to Jerusalem from 381-384 C.E., recounts her journey from Clysma on the Red Sea a city which she calls Arabia located at the edge of the Sinai Peninsula.[94] Here she specifies that there were four desert stations (*mansiones*) along this route, with soldiers stationed at each which escorted them from fort to fort (*de castro ad castrum*).[95]

> From Clesma, that is from the Red Sea, there are four desert stations, but though in the desert, yet there are four desert stations with soldiers and officers who always escorted us from fort to fort. On the journey the holy men who were with us, clergy and monks, showed us all the places which I was always seeking in accordance with the scriptures; some of these were on the left, some on the right of our path, some were far distant from, and some near to our route.

After a visit to a desert monastery in this land, Egeria mentions sending back the soldiers who had escorted them once they again entered settled territory.[96]

> From this place we sent back the soldiers who according to Roman discipline had given us the help of their escort as long as we had walked through the suspected places. Now, however, as the public road, which passed by the city of Arabia and leads from the Thebaid to Pelusium, ran through Egypt, there was no need to trouble the soldiers further.

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[94] *Itinerarium Egeriae (Etheriae)* M.L. McClure and C.L. Feltoe, ed. and trans. (London, 1919).

[95] *Itinerarium Egeriae,* 7.2: "Sunt ergo a Clesma, id est a mare rubro, usque ad Arabiam civitatem mansiones quattuor per eremo, sic tamen per eremum, ut cata mansiones monasteria sint cum militibus et praepositis, qui nos deducebant semper de castro ad castrum. In eo ergo itinere sancti, qui nobiscum erant, hoc est clerici vel monachi, ostendebant nobis singula loca, quae semper ego iuxta scripturas requirebam; nam alia in sinistro, alia in dextro de itinere nobis erant, alia etiam longius de via, alia in proximo."

[96] *Itinerarium Egeriae,* 9.3: "Nos autem inde iam remisimus milites, qui nobis pro disciplina Romana auxilia praebuerant, quandiu per loca suspecta ambulaveramus; iam autem, quoniam ager publicum erat per Aegyptum, quod transiebat per Arabiam civitatem, id est quod mittit de Thebaida in Pelusio: et ideo iam non fuit necesse vexare milites."

Finally, Egeria and her party commenced their journey along the road through Sinai to Palestine, again travelling via a string of desert stations (*mansiones*).[97]

> Thence I set out again, and journeying through all those stations in Egypt through which we had travelled before, I arrived at the boundary of Palestine. Thence in the Name of Christ our God I passed through several stations in Palestine and returned to Aelia, that is Jerusalem.

So here we have a valuable account of exactly how the forts of the limes functioned as protection for travellers en route through the desert during this period.

The above data represent only a survey of the most notable examples of the Tetrarchic fortification program in Arabia. They are sufficient to make several definite points about the defensive trends in this sector. (1) Diocletian made a significant investment of manpower and material in building-up the defenses of this largely desert frontier in the late third to early fourth centuries. (2) This program continues the trend set by earlier emperors from the time of Severus and before to maintain a series of fortifications along the edge of cultivated settlement in Arabia, but it also goes much further by extending fortifications into the interior desert itself, rather than keeping to the vicinity of the original commerical route of the *via nova Traiana.* This suggests an increased threat from the nomads of the interior, or merely an attempt to control thier traffic across the frontier. (3) None of the fortifications was intended for a force larger than approximately 1000-1500 troops, and most were intended for smaller cohort-size units of about 400-500 troops.[98] A defensive line consisting of smaller, sub-legionary sized units fits with the

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[97] *Itinerarium Egeriae,* 9.7: "Et inde proficiscens denuo, faciens iter per singulas mansiones Aegypti, per quas iter habueramus, perveni ad fines Palaestinae. Et inde in nomine Christi Dei nostri faciens denuo mansiones aliquod per Palaestina regressa sum in Aelia, id est in Ierusolimam."

[98] Jones (1964), 56.

statements in the literary sources that Diocletian increased the number of army units by multiples

and created a more continuous line of defense/control across the frontiers. The details from

archaeology and epigraphy therefore confirm and lend greater detail to Lactantius's account.[99]

Nevertheless, neither the literary nor archaeological/epigraphic sources allow us to list the

individual units which Diocletian placed on the frontier, nor even reliably comment upon the

exact type of units stationed within these fortifications in Arabia. Living quarters for the numbers

indicated can be identified, as well as stabling for an indefinite (though generally limited)

number of livestock, but in most cases, nothing more can be said with certainty. This has not

been a roadblock to speculation on the part of historians, however.[100] The small unit sizes *do* fit

with a strategy of defending a wide geographic area against the unpredictable and sporadic threat

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[99] Lactantius, a Christian heavily biased against Diocletian, stated famously that Diocletian wasted the resources of the empire by increasing the size of the army fourfold. "This man, by avarice partly, and partly by timid counsels, overturned the Roman Empire. For he made choice of three persons to share the government with him; and thus, the empire having been quartered, armies were multiplied, and each of the four princes strove to maintain a much more considerable military force than any sole emperor had done in times past, Lactantius, *De mortibus persecutorum*, 7.2. See Lactantius, *De mortibus persecutorum,* J.L. Creed, ed. (Oxford,1984). Though there is evidence that Diocletian did increase the size of the army, fourfold is insupportable, however, and more likely reflects Diocletian's practice of splitting the existing legions and also provinces into smaller units. See Jones (1964),15. On the other hand, there is Zosimus, a pagan biased against Constantine, who states, (2.34) "By the forethought of Diocletian, the frontiers of the empire everywhere were covered with cities, garrisons and fortifications which housed the whole army. Consequently, it was impossible for the barbarians to cross the frontier because they were confined at every point by forces capable of resisting their attacks. Constantine destroyed this security by removing most of the troops from the frontiers and stationing them in cities which did not need assistance, thus both stripping of protection those being molested by the barbarians and subjecting the cities left alone by them to the outrages of the soldiers, so that henceforth most have become deserted. Moreover, he enervated the troops by allowing them to devote themselves to shows and luxuries. In plain terms, Constantine was the origin and beginning of the present destruction of the empire." See Zosimus, *Historia nova*, L. Mendelssohn, ed. and comm. (Bude, 1971-1989). The stationing of troops in cities away from the frontiers undoubtedly refers to the formation of the reserve field armies.

[100] I.e., the ancient declarations of Lactantius and Zosimus, and the modern theory of Edward Luttwak which credits Constantine and the entire Late Roman period with a consistent system of defense in depth, or line of defensive fortifications on the frontier backed up by reserves of highly mobile and elite forces behind the lines. As this paper shows for Arabia, the specific evidence from each region supports the ad hoc approach aimed at what worked for the given situation, and not an empire-wide system. See Luttwak (1976) and E.C. Nischer, "The Army Reforms of Diocletian and Constantine and their Modifications up to the Time of the Notitia dignitatum," *JRS* 13 (1923), 10-12.

from nomads. (4.) There is little evidence to support going beyond purely defensive or regulatory reasons for the fortifications themselves, or to look for some grand strategy pursued by Diocletian throughout the empire as a whole. (5.) The increased threat from nomads may correlate with the increased Persian threat at the beginning of Diocletian's reign, if one views the nomads as potential *allies* of the Persians, evidence for which will be considered in the following chapter on the nomads of the frontier.

The Frontier under Constantine

Diocletian was building upon the trends begun by earlier Roman leaders in Arabia, and so was Constantine, as the archaeological and epigraphic evidence for his reign shows. For the period 307-337, there is no evidence for major changes in the frontier defenses of Arabia. In fact, there is little evidence for any significant activity at all on this front. Constantinian milestones indicate that stretches of the *via nova Traiana* were repaired between 334-337.[101] The late dates of these milestones indicate that they were more likely intended to facilitate movement of troops from Arabia northwards for defense on the Persian front, which was becoming more active at this time.[102] There are also two Latin inscriptions from the aforementioned fort at Qasr el-Azraq. These refer to repairs in the fortifications.[103] Another inscription from Khirbet Umm el-Menara, between Azraq and Bostra, mentions the construction of a reservoir in 334 for the local

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[101] C. Zuckerman, "Aur. Valerianus (293-305) et Fl. Severinus (333), commandants en Arabie, et la forteress d'Azraq, " *Antiquite tardive* 2 (1994), 83-88.

[102] D.L. Kennedy, *Archaeological Explorations on the Roman Frontier in North-East Jordan*, BAR International Series 134 (Oxford, 1982), 184.

[103] Parker (1986), 145.

inhabitants, since they were being attacked by Saracens while trying to procure water.[104]

Presumably these settlers were using wells also claimed by the neighboring desert tribes, hence

the conflict. With the exception of one *castellum*, pottery surveys show that existing

fortifications continued in use throughout the fourth century and later.[105] However, as with the

Diocletianic defenses, there is no indication of exactly which units were stationed there under

Constantine. Thus, the statement of Zosimus that Constantine stripped the frontiers of their

defenses and redeployed them within the boundaries of the empire is clearly inaccurate, at least

in the case of Arabia.[106]

Other Sources for the Road and Defense Network: the *Notitia dignitatum*, the *Tabula Peutingeriana*, the *Corpus Agrimensorum* and the *Itinerarium Antonini*

In an attempt to fill in the gaps in the sources, many scholars have called upon the lists of

the *Notitia dignitatum*.[107] This document is a detailed list of all civil and military offices divided

into eastern and western halves. As such, it includes every legion and every commander, as well

as where they were stationed at the time of publication.[108] They have attempted to apply this late

fourth to fifth century document onto the late third century army of Diocletian. If one does this,

then one is assuming that the two armies, separated by a century, were of the same character. As

such, one can then declare that Diocletian was in fact already using the fully developed late

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[104] Parker (1986), 145.

[105] Parker (1986), 145.

[106] Issac, *The Limits of Empire* (Oxford, 1992) 72.

[107] See Jones (1964), Appendix II, 1417-50 for full text and discussion of the *Notitia dignitatum*.

[108] Jones (1964), Appendix II, 1417-50.

Roman army and was deploying it in the classic defense-in-depth posture of dedicated frontier armies supported by strategically placed mobile armies behind the lines.[109] One can then conjecture that the fortifications and infrastructure of the *Strata Diocletiana* were a part of this defense-in-depth. To use the *Notita Dignitatum* in such a manner is perilous. The time period and events which intervene between Diocletian and the drawing up of this document present the primary difficulties. Jones dates the eastern portion of the document to sometime between 395 and 413, and c 420 for the western part.[110] Thus, approximately a hundred years had elapsed since the existence of Diocletian's army. Further, during this later period the empire had suffered numerous barbarian incursions across its span, sometimes with grave consequences for the imperial armies. Most notably, the aftermath of the battle of Adrianople in 378 saw a vast upheaval and displacement of the military forces of the east and made necessary the extensive reorganization of its defenses under Theodosius. (r. 379-395).[111]

That such a unit is also found in the first rank of the palatine *comitatenses* of the east in the *Notitia* advances the possibility that this legion in fact dates back to Diocletian and may represent the *lanciarii* referred to in *CIL* 3, 6194. Some of the units listed in the *Notitia dignitatum* may have been in Diocletian's army, but this still does not tell us where they were stationed or deployed in the third and fourth centuries.[112] The ad hoc nature of deploying forces

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[109] For a specific discussion of the dating and character of the document see Jones (1964), Appendix II, iii, 347-80.

[110] Jones (1964), 1419-20.

[111] Jones (1964), 52-53.

[112] That said, there are certain logical conjectures which one can make regarding Diocletian's army from an examination of the document. These come from evidence found in the names of various senior units in the palatine *comitatenses*. Jones suggests a number of units which may date to Diocletian and have been very close to him, perhaps constituting part of his *comitatus*. See *CIL* iii, 6194; also, in *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*, H. Dessau, ed., 3 vols. (Berlin, 1892-1916, reprint with *CIL* concordance 1954-55), 2781. First, there are the

to meet the demands of the moment meant that these units may have moved around multiple times to completely different parts of the frontiers. Therefore, though some good educated guesses may be possible from the *Notitia dignitatum*, it is simply not possible to speak of Diocletian's army organization, constitution or deployment in an exact or comprehensive way from this source. This is not to say that basic *principles* behind the later Roman army organization were not being developed at this time.

Lanciarii Seniores. Such a unit was indeed present in Diocletian's *comitatus*, as the evidence from the Troesmis-Iglitza inscription shows. See *Notitia dignitatum, Occ.* V, 145; VII, 3; *Or.* V, 43, 44. That such a unit is also found in the first rank of the palatine *comitatenses* of the east in the *Notitia* advances the possibility that this legion in fact dates back to Diocletian and may represent the *lanciarii* referred to in *CIL* 3, 6194. Then there are the *Ioviani* and *Herculiani Seniores/Iuniores* which rank respectively first and second among the palatine legions of the west and second and third behind the *Lanciarii Seniores* in the east. Thus, these were key regiments of the later field army. There is the possibility, though unlikely, that these originated as detachments of Diocletian's two Scythian frontier legions, *I Iovia* and *II Herculia*, but were promoted to the *comitatus* at an early date. See Tomlin (2000), 161. Instead, based on circumstantial evidence, it is possible that these were raised by Diocletian as entirely new units, along with a sister pair, *Solenses* and *Martenses*, whose names allude to the tutelary deities of the two junior colleagues of the tetrarchy, Constantius and Galerius. See Zosimus, *New History*, trans. and comm. R.T. Ridley (Canberra, 1982), n.66. We know also that Magnentius was commander of these legions under Constans (c. 350-53) and they are again referred to under the direct command of Jovian (c. 363-64) See Zosimus, *Historia nova*, 2.42, 3.30. See also Tomlin (2000), 159ff. They could also be analogous with, or were formed, on the same principle as Severus' field army, *legio II Parthica*, which may indeed be their predecessor. See Southern, P., K. Dixon, *The Late Roman Army* (New Haven, CT, 1996), 9-11; Tomlin (2000), 162ff. Also, on the army of the Republic through the second century army see L. Keppie, *The Making of the Roman Army* (London, 1998) and G. Webster, *The Roman Imperial Army of the First and Second Centuries A.D.* (London, 1998). This meshes well with the manner of raising field armies before, during and after the reign of Diocletian and up to the time of Constantine, that is ad hoc. See *Notitia dignitatum, Occ.* VI, 43; VII, 159; *Or.* VI, 28. In terms of cavalry, two units mentioned in the *Notitia* are worthy of note. These are the *Comites Seniores* and the *Equites Promoti Seniores*. The first is certainly reminiscent of the *comites* mentioned in the inscriptions from Diocletian's time. In the *Notitia*, it ranks first among the palatine vexillations in the west and east. See *Notitia dignitatum, Occ.* VI, 44; VII, 160. *Or.* V, 28. However, *comites* was likely a common name for a cavalry unit accompanying the emperor and thus, a specific connection between the Diocletianic and later units is unclear. One can conclude that there were cavalry units styled *comites* in the forces close to Diocletian and in the senior vexillations of the fourth century field army. Finally, there are the *Equites Promoti Seniores* of the *Notitia*. This unit is ranked respectively second behind the *Comites Seniores* in the west and first among the palatine vexillations in the east. So again, like the *Comites*, they are among the top vexillations in the imperial *comitatus* of this time. Jones forwards the possibility that this unit may date to Diocletian based on the fact that *Promoti* was used to refer to legionary cavalry detachments operating apart from their legion. This is insufficient to prove that they derive from Diocletian since it was regular practice to displace units depending on the needs of the moment. The fact that they rank highly and come directly after the *Comites* indicates their seniority and hence relative age. Thus, on circumstantial grounds, it is plausible that these represent units of Diocletian's period.

Thus, the *Notitia* lists give us little additional information on the nature of the frontier defenses in Arabia and what exactly Diocletian's aims were there. This goes as much for the illustrations of the *Notitia,* which look like a map of the empire, but which are actually only a visual representation of the entries on the list. The intent of the illustrations was to create a visual representation of these units or offices in a given administrative division, not a geographic representation. This corresponds with the arrangement of the units in the text as well, which were intended to show rank over geographical location. The geographic connotation is simply a byproduct of the fact that the administrative divisions are often made on the basis of geographic divisions, such as provinces.

However, that said, there are clear geographic icons in the text, such as the rivers, mountains, animals, etc. These merely function as decoration and add an element of interest or "entertainment value" to the deluxe copy of the *Notitia*. For example, an icon of Egypt is the Nile River, and so on for the Tigris and Euphrates in Mesopotamia, etc. One expects to find snakes and ostriches in Arabia, and so they are represented on the folio for Arabia. Thus, the copies of the *Notitia* which survive to us are copies of a what must have been an exceptional version of the *Notitia* in its day. Its lavish illustrations represent a prize copy meant for display rather than just practical day to day use. One must assume that there were other "everyday" versions of the *Notitia* lists, which were used as guides to the imperial administrative structure.

All of this holds true for the lavishly pictorial manuscript of the *Tabula Peutingeriana*, illustrated with imperial Roman roads and distances, but without a sense of accurate scale, and with the additional of other embellishments such as mountains, rivers, flora and fauna, and even historical, geographical and biblical commentary. Such a "map" which is drawn on multiple large folia, was clearly not meant for one to carry around on actual journeys, but rather

represented an entertaining reference. It is in fact an illustrated display version of the very common lists of itineraries used as a guide for ancient travel, such as the *Itinerarium Antonini.* In this same way, the illustrated *Notitia* is a display copy of the administrative "map" of the Late Roman Empire. Like the relative arrangement of structures in the *Notitia*, their size also marks the rank or importance of the entry which it illustrates. For example, provinces such as Italy and Britain receive a large structural icon which takes up an entire folio. However, smaller commands, such as the forts of a *dux* are illustrated with correspondingly smaller icons. The number of forts which must be portrayed on a single folio also seems to be a factor in the size allotted to each by the artist. Some commands have more forts to be contained on a single folio than others do, so the size of the structures is adjusted to fit them on the page. The somewhat generic representations of structures in this set seem to point to the same general conclusion as for the arrangement and geographic details of the images. That is to say that there was no concern for accurate representation of what a structure actually looked like, but rather an interest in creating a visual icon for the corresponding entry in the *Notitia* text. The designs were elaborated for the larger and more important entries and simplified for the less important ones.

Similarly, the size of the illustrations marks the rank and importance of the entry. A similar use of building icons is seen in the *Tabula Peutingeriana* and the *Corpus Agrimensorum Romanorum*. The structures in these documents only serve to mark the general existence of a location, and not an accurate and realistic portrayal of that place. The size and elaboration of a location corresponds to its importance. Furthermore, there is a marked similarity of design between some of the *Notitia* structures and those in the *Tabula Peutingeriana* and the *Corpus Agrimensorum Romanorum*, both of which date to the late antique period, and so correspond to

the late antique archetype of the *Notitia*.[113] This is evidence for a common late antique

convention shared across these documents. For the purposes of this study, the above documents

are too simplistic to contribute detail to what we know of the defense, road and communication

networks of the east, or of the empire as a whole. They do help us understand better what the

Romans thought of their world and how they conceived it spatially and visually. For example,

the section of the *Tabula Peutingeriana* for Syria and Mesopotamia indicates the limits of

Roman territory, *Arc[a]e fines romanorum,* "Fortresses, the frontiers of the Romans," on the

edge of the road system, and the "frontier between the Syrian army and commerce of the

barbarian," *fines exercitus syriatic(a)e et conmertium barbaror(um),* below in the open desert.[114]

Examples such as this imply a Roman conception of some definite point which was within

Roman territory versus outside.

The Roman legal concept of *postliminium* indicates that the distinction of what was

inside the boundaries (*in fines*) of Rome versus outside (*ex fines*) was crucial to the question of

legal rights. [115] This fact was clear in cases such as a Roman citizen captured in war by a foreign

power, or of someone who left Roman territory by their own will, such as in the following

comments of the jurist Paulus in the *Digest* of the *Corpus iuris civilis*:[116]

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[113] P.C. Berger, *The Insignia of the Notitia dignitatum* (New York, 1981), 114ff.

[114] *Die Peutingersche Tafel*, K. Miller, ed. (Stuttgart, 1962); Whittaker reads *exercitus syriatic(a)e* as possibly referring to a client state. See Whittaker (1994), 68. He suggests Palmyra, but one of the nomadic confederacies fits well for the late date of the *tabula*. More on this in the following chapter.

[115] Whittaker (1994), 68. See also P. Trousset, "La frontière romaine et ses contradictions," in J. Metral, P. Sanlaville, eds., *Travaux de la Maison de l'Orient* (Lyon, 1993). *Postliminium* encapsulates the term *limen*, which defines the threshold of an entryway, such as into a house. So, with *post* defines being within the threshold of the space. See *Oxford Latin Dictionary (OLD)*, Second Edition, P.G.W. Glare ed. (Oxford, 2012).

[116] *Corpus iuris civilis*, 3 vols, T. Mommsen, P. Krueger, eds. (Berlin, 1895); *The Civil Law*, trans. S.P. Scott (Cincinnati, 1932).

(49.15.19 pr.) Postliminium est ius amissae rei recipiendae ab extraneo et in statum pristinum restituendae inter nos ac liberos populos regesque moribus legibus constitutum. nam quod bello amissimus aut etiam citra bellum, hoc si rursus recipiamus, dicimur postliminio recipere. idque naturali aequitate introductum est, ut qui per iniuriam ab extraneis detinebatur, is, ubi in fines suos redisset, pristinum ius suum reciperet.

The right of *postliminium* is that of recovering from a stranger property which has been lost, and of restoring it to its former condition; and this right has been established among us and other free peoples and kings, by custom and by law. For when we recover anything that we have lost by war or even outside of war, we are said to recover it by the right of *postliminium.* This rule has been introduced by natural equity, so that anyone who has been detained unjustly by strangers will recover his former rights whenever he returns to his own country.

This application incudes allied kings within Roman jurisdiction:

(49.15.19.3) Postliminio redisse videtur, cum in fines nostros intraverit, sicuti amittitur, ubi fines nostros excessit. sed et si in civitatem sociam amicamve aut ad regem socium vel amicum venerit, statim postliminio redisse videtur, quia ibi primum nomine publico tutus esse incipiat.

Anyone is considered to have returned with the right of *postliminium* when he passes our frontiers, just as he loses the right as soon as he goes beyond them. When, however, he visits an allied or friendly state, or an allied or friendly king, he is understood to immediately return with the right of *postliminium,* because, while there, he began to be secure through reliance on the public honor.

Postliminium encapsulated the term *limen*, which defined the threshold of an entrance, such as into a house.[117] So with *post* it defined being within the threshold of the space. Associated with this concept was the term *limes*, which originally expressed a path which bordered a plot of land or divided two plots of land. Eventually, it came to denote either a road which entered enemy territory or roads which bordered Roman territory, and finally a whole system of border defenses, such as the *Strata Diocletiana*.[118] So the *fines* was the general frontier space and the *limes* the physical marker delineating the occupation of the frontier line. The legal

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[117] *Oxford Latin Dictionary*

[118] *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, Fourth Edition, S. Hornblower, A. Spawforth, Esther Lidinow edd., (Oxford, 2012)

history here goes far in explaining the psychological importance of having a concrete sense of limits in the Roman psyche, and indeed the mentality of drawing borderlines on maps which the western world subsequently inherited.
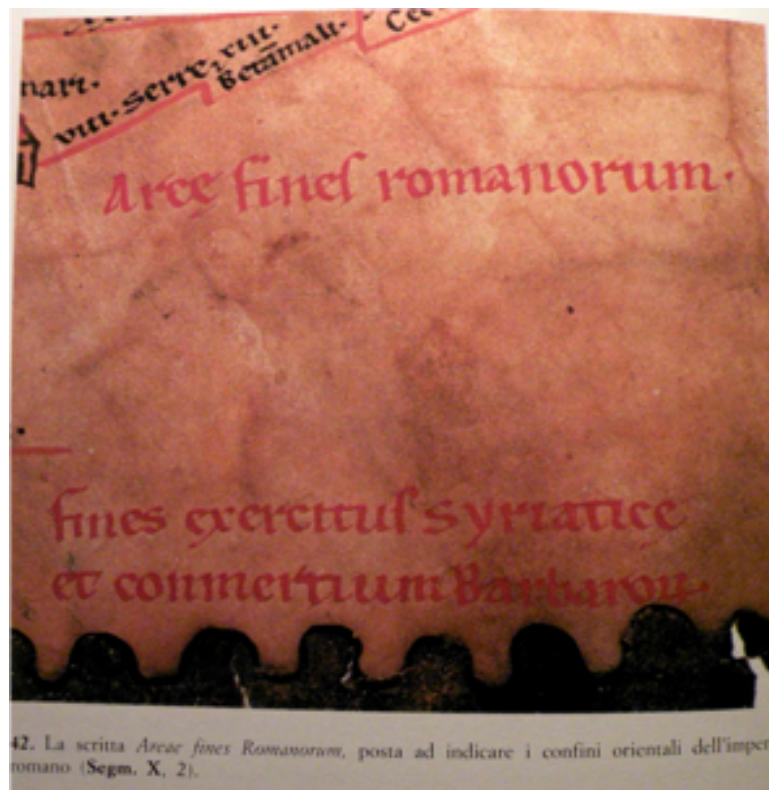

Figure 31: *Tabula Peutingeriana*

Comparative Fortified Frontiers

Fortified frontiers are found in several other sectors of the Roman Empire. The frontier *limes* closest in concept to the frontier in Arabia is the *fossatum Africae* in North Africa.[119]

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[119] D.J. Mattingly, ed., *The Archaeology of the Fazzan*, 4 vols. (London, 2003-13), 208.

Originally begun by Hadrian in Numidia, and with counterparts in Tunisia and other sectors of Africa, it seems never to have actually served a military purpose, though, like the frontier in Arabia, it was clearly built to do so if necessary.[120] However, even if there is little evidence that such frontiers saw agressive action, they functioned to regulate the traffic into and out of the settled zone, and at the very least as a concrete symbol of Roman claims and presence which projected psychologically across into the emptiness.[121]

A similar function has been suggested for Hadrian's Wall in Scotland, which also seems never to have seen military action.[122] Breeze sees the wall as merely the equivalent of barbed wire, meant primarily to mark the boundary of Roman territory, and regulate access via its gate system.[123] Here an important distinction between this frontier and that in Arabia is that the former was in fact a solid unbroken barrier, whereas the latter was a widely spaced line of defense which formed a *limes*. Moreover, for Hadrian's Wall, the gates are regularly spaced but sometimes don't actually correspond with Roman roads which continue across the frontier. There are also other Roman fortresses beyond the wall itself.[124]

Similarly, the "Obergermanischer Limes" in southwest Germany consists of a series of watchtowers whose design was ill-suited to defence or even observation, by virtue of lacking windows.[125] One explanation for this is that the towers and associated earthworks were aimed

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[120] E.W.B. Fentress, *Numidia and the Roman Army* (1979), 66, 98ff; Trousset (1993), 931-42.

[121] Isaac (1990), 414. Also see D.J. Mattingly, *Frontiers of the Roman Empire: the African Frontiers* (London, 2013).

[122] First suggested by R.G. Collingwood, *The Vasculum* 8 (1921), 4-9.

[123] D.J. Breeze, B. Dobson, *Hadrian's Wall* (Oxford, 1976), 208.

[124] Isaac (1990), 415.

[125] Sir Ian Richmond, *Trajan's Army on Trajan's Column* (London, 1982), 38.

more at intimidating the enemy than actual defensive use.[126] Unlike in Scotland, the German

defenses lacked regular gates or points of passage, nor roads which extended into the wilderness

beyond, which leads to the conclusion that they were meant as a definite mark of the end of

Roman interests.[127]

Isaac sees the frontiers as merely ideas and symbols more than concrete attempts to create

a border, based on evidence that they were often deliberately designed to be permeable, seemed

rarely to be used for actual defense, and that Roman activity ebbed and flowed across the *limes*

depending on the situation and interests of the emperor of the moment. Moreover the ad hoc

nature of the frontiers is against them being connecting into any grand scheme or functional

whole at any given time.[128] In this sense the actual structures of the frontier may have had an

important value as propaganda and theater of a sort. Certainly, the focus on repetitively

inscribing the imperial nomenclature on milestones and other structures was meant to impress

the inhabitants of the provinces with the everpresence of the emperor in their midst. Moreoever

Isaac has noted that there are more milestones in built-up areas than there are in the open and

more remote areas such as along the roads of the Arabian frontier. Thus, the milestones' primary

purpose seems to have been displaying the imperial nomenclature as much as it was counting

miles.[129] An example of a milestone inscription from the *via nova Traiana* is found below:

Imp (erator) Caesar [divi Nervae fil(ius)] Nerva Traian[us] Aug(ustus) Germ(anicus) Dac(icus)

pontif(ex) max(imus) trib(uniciae) potest(atis) [X]VI im(perator) VI co(n)[s(ul)] V [p(ater)

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[126] Isaac (1990), 415.

[127] Isaac (1990), 415. See also Hanson, "The Nature and Function of Roman Frontiers."

[128] Isaac (1990), 416.

[129] Isaac (1990), 304-305.

p(atriae) refecit pe]r [C(aium) Cla]udium Severum leg(atum) Aug(usti) pr(o) pr(aetore) A . . .

(Thomsen, no. 215)

Emperor Caesar, son of the divine Nerva, Nerva Trajan Augustus Germanicus Dacicus, pontifex maximus, with the power of a tribune 16 times, imperator 6 times, consul 5 times, father of the country, has restored this [road] through the legate Gaius Claudius Severus, propraetor of Augustus. . .

Such propaganda must have been aimed at the troops themselves or other citizens and inhabitants who were literate in Latin, the major language of the milestones and other official inscriptions, though sometimes distances were given in Greek as well.[130] Given such an interest in propaganda, perhaps the fortifications themselves were meant to show the presence of the emperor, even out on the very farthest frontiers, and in a sense to lay claim to the region in the *minds* of the people there as well as the army itself.

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[130] Isaac (1990), 306.

Figure 32: Milestone which marked the beginning of the *via nova Traiana* at Aila (Aqaba).

Conclusions

The archaeological and epigraphic evidence points clearly to a steady build-up of frontier defenses in Arabia, especially from the time of Severus onward. The emperor Diocletian accelerated this trend, and Constantine continued it. Although these forces were broken up into small legionary and cavalry detachments, together they still represented a considerable number of troops dedicated to relatively permanent garrisons out in the desert, especially when one considers the almost unsustainable military demands on the rest of the empire during their reigns, i.e. on the Rhine and upper Danube. This raises a new question: Why were Diocletian and Constantine so concerned about a possible threat on this desert front which did not border on Persia proper, such that they would strengthen the defenses to their greatest extent yet, and then maintain them over decades?

The fortifications are undoubtedly strongly built and armed structures as a rule and such defenses performed many roles: (1) To protect the road and its commerce. The Roman fortifications of Arabia followed exactly routes of strategic and economic importance from earliest times. Thus, the Romans merely inherited the maintenance and security of a long-established network of roads protecting trade and travel in the region. It is still an important highway in modern times. Thus, the fortifications could be seen as providing internal security, as much as external security. The roads provided a way to speedily move forces from duties policing the Levant and Arabia, to the immediate Persian frontier on the Euphrates in the case of a major conflict there. (2) To protect something near the fort itself, such as a water supply or settlements. (3) To protect whatever is going on in the fort itself, such as administrative activities, trading, tax collection, etc. However, given that there is so little hard evidence for the actual activities that went on in and around the forts, we are left with their obvious function as

defense against the external, or regulation of movement across the frontier zone. (4) To display and mark symbolically the presence of the Roman emperor's power and rule in regions which were at the practical limits of Roman interests, creating in effect a psychological boundary. (5) The archaeological evidence from Umm el-Jimal indicates that the imperial occupation had a parasitic effect on the local, or at least tended to suppress its growth. This in turn supports the case for a strong local gravity at work under the surface of the imperial shell, which comes into its own when the shell weakens/ceases to exist in the later periods. This factor may also play a role in illuminating the state of the local on the eve of Islam, and how the weakening of the imperial veneer might have aided the spread of the Arab Empire in the 7th century.

In short, the Arabian frontier was more an example of what has been termed a 'broad transitional region.'[131] Whittaker's view of the frontiers as representing "a compromise between the range of conquest and the economy of rule" fits well with the evidence presented here, and works against any supposition that the Romans viewed the frontiers like modern borders, but instead as 'limits to their effective power'. The captions for Arabia in the illustration from the *Tabula Peutingeriana* above imply such a view. Perhaps in their own view, the Romans simply chose not to try to control certain zones directly, though given the appropriate effort and expenditure of resources, they could have controlled them, and, in their eyes, they had the right to do so at any time.[132] Thus the edge of the Arabian desert was, in the words of Whittaker, "a line of communication and supply, the base from which the Romans extended their control without any sense of boundaries." At times the frontier was defensive in nature when required.[133]

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[131] Whittaker (1994), 59.

[132] See P. Southern and K. Dixon, *The Late Roman Army* (New Haven, CT, 1996), 129-30,141-142.

[133] Isaac, 199.

CHAPTER THREE:
ARAB NOMADS IN THE LATE EMPIRE:
LIABILITIES OR STRATEGIC PARTNERS?

From the third century onwards, there is a marked increase in the number of references to Arab nomadic forces in ancient sources dealing with the eastern empire. This is by comparison with sources of the first through second centuries which make brief and generic references to these peoples, often known as 'saracens.'[1] The higher profile of nomadic peoples in the late imperial scene is the result of several factors: (1) As the Romans took more direct control over the zones on the immediate edge of the Roman frontiers, they increasingly had to deal directly with the nomadic peoples on the fringes of civilization. (2) The long, high-stakes war with Persia not only brought Rome into contact with nomads allied with the enemy, but also led the Romans to use nomadic allies of their own. (3) Changes within the social and political structure of the nomadic societies themselves caused their larger regional importance to change, and thus their interaction with surrounding political powers. (4) The increased use of nomadic allies in the east is part of a trend towards their use as official *auxilia* in the fully developed late Roman army of the late-fourth through sixth centuries. These conclusions show that the institutionalization of nomad allies should be seen not as an innovation of the late Roman emperors, but rather the end of a long evolutionary train which gradually saw nomadic peoples from outside the empire coopted into the late Roman state and becoming a part of it.

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[1] The term used by Greco-Roman sources is usually 'saracen', the etymology and use of which has been a point of debate, but the term seems to refer to large groups of nomads, rather than specific tribes or units. Indeed, the very word "Saracen" preserves the meaning "coalition" See D.F. Graf and M. O'Connor, "The Origen of the Term Saracen and the Rawwafah Inscriptions," *Byzantine Studies*, 4, 52-66.

The Development of Roman Contact with Nomads

Before the time of Trajan in the second century, Rome had at various times committed substantial forces to the east, most always aimed at the threat of the Parthians. These campaigns were waged not by standing garrison forces, but rather using the long-standing practice of ad hoc armies which were raised for the specific threat or purpose, and then disbanded when no longer required. After Pompey added Syria in 64/3 BC, the first official Roman province in the east, the Romans called upon such forces more and more as the requirements of internal security and frontier defense increased. Still, ad hoc forces remained the rule until Trajan created the first standing garrisons in the east. Certainly, Trajan deemed these necessary to control the vast and widespread area which he had added to the Roman political sphere. Although Roman power now extended into Mesopotamia, Assyria and Armenia, Hadrian chose to abandon these zones, though they would continue to be bones of contention in the future.

Trajan's conquests in Arabia mark the first shift in Rome's dealings with nomadic Arabs. He created the new province of Arabia Petraea in 106 and subsequently stationed a full legion in garrison at it s capital of Bostra.[2] Now Rome occupied territory on the fringe of the desert itself, rather than dealing through client kings as was the usual practice during the Principate. However, there is limited evidence that the Romans had encountered Arabs before Trajan, and even

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[2] The fortresses at Bostra and Singara were the largest fortifications of the east, which reflects their construction and importance from earlier imperial times. See Kennedy and Riley (1990), 131. Bostra served as a major administrative and commercial link in the Nabatean kingdom and was situated on the Wadi al-Sirhan trade route. Trajan (98-117) declared the city capital of the province of Arabia, strengthened its fortifications and stationed *Legio III Cyrenaica* there. The fort itself has an area of 16.8 ha./41.5 acres. Trajan first captured Singara, a city in northern Mesopotamia, in 114. Later it became the base of *Legio I Parthica* under Septimius Severus (193-211). The fort has an area of 17 ha./42 acres. Both of these fortresses were built to house the much larger full legions characteristic of the earlier periods. The strength of such legions was 4000-5000 troops, at least 4-5 times larger than largest garrison units of the late period.

employed them as allies.[3] Furthermore, the terms *phylarch* and *strategos*, the two most

commonly used to denote a nomadic chieftain allied to the Romans, are well attested in literary

and epigraphic sources from the Augustan period onward.[4] However, the number of references to

nomads allied to Rome increases into the second century.

Of particular importance is a bilingual inscription erected for a Thamudic temple in honor

of Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus, under the auspices of the official legate in Arabia,

Claudius Modestus (167-9).[5] Written in Nabatean and Greek, the inscription refers to the actions

of the previous governor, Anistius Adventus (166-7), who seems to have mediated in a dispute

between nomadic groups outside of the boundaries of the province proper. As Isaac states, this

indicates that even before the Byzantine era, Rome could exercise significant influence over

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[3] Cassius was accused falsely in 51 B.C.E. of setting Arabs loose on his province. See Cicero, *Epistulae ad Familiares,* 3.27.30: "Sed de Parthorum transitu nuntii varios sermones excitarunt . . . A te litterae non venerunt et, nisi Deiotari subsecutae essent, in eam opinionem Cassius veni<eb>at, quae diripuisset et Arabas in provinciam imminisse easque Parthos esse senuati renuntiasse." In the fourth century, the historian Diodorus describes the Arabs during the early Principate. See Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca historica*, 29.94.2-95.2. Strabo states that they while the Pathians control the territory on the other side of the Euphrates, the Romans and Arab chiefs, described as *phylarchs*, control the nearer bank as for as Babylonia. See Strabo, *Geographia,* 26.1.28. He indicates that some of the those neighboring the Romans are also their allies, those near the river less so, and those nearer Arabia Felix more so. See also B. Isaac, *The Limits of Empire* (Oxford, 1990), 237.

[4] The first use of the term *phylarch* specifically applied to a nomad chief is in the Strabo passage cited above. Inscriptions attest to the term used by nomadic chieftans to denote their official relationship with the Romans. See M. Sartre, *Trois etudes sur l'Arabie romaine et byzantine* (Brussels, 1982), 123-8. Such use would become standard practice, defined as a title of rank given to chiefs on the eastern frontier who commanded a zone of the *limes* which corresponded to that of the Roman *dux*. Each phylarch was also usually given a rank in the official Roman heirarchy of the Late Empire. See Jones (1964), 611.

[5] This inscription was found in at Ruwwafa, an oasis 200 km south-east of Aela in the Hejaz. See J.T. Milik, in P.J. Parr, G.L. Harding, and J.E. Dayton, *Bulletin of the Institute of Archaeology* 10 (1972), 54-7. Discussion in D.F. Graf and M. O'Connor, "The Origin of the Term 'Saracen' and the Ruwwafa Inscriptions," *Byzantine Studies* 4 (1977), 52-66; D.F. Graf, "The Saracens and the Defense of the Arabian Frontier," *BASOR* 229 (1978) 9-12; J. Beaucamp*,* "Rawwafa et les Thamoudeens," *SDB* 9 (1979), 1467-75; G.W. Bowersock, *"*The Greek-Nabatean Bilingual Inscription at Ruwwafa, Saudi Arabia," *Le monde grec: Hommages a Claire Preaux* (1975), 513-22.

allies who were not an official part of the provincial administration.[6] The use of the Thamudic

term *ethnos*, or *skrt*, as applied to the peoples involved in the dispute, could be used to mean

'confederation'. If so, this is early evidence of the existence of the larger confederacies which

would become a common fixture of the fourth century.

Such a confederacy is attested in a key third century inscription from the legionary base

of Umm al-Jemal[7] in southern Jordan.[8] This bilingual inscription mentions the teacher of a

certain Gadimathos (Jadhima) who is "King of the Thanoumenoi" (Tanukh).[9] The main

inscription is in Nabataean with a secondary literal translation in Greek. (See figure below.) In

translation the inscription reads:

"This is the tomb of Fihr, son of Shullai, the tutor of Gadhimat, the king of Tanukh."

The inscription was discovered in 1909 inserted into wall of a house located near the west

wall of the city of Umm al-Jimal. Littman dates the inscription to approx. 250 C.E., based on the

style of the script and the language used. The inscription is written in a script which is

characteristic of the transition from Nabataean to Arabic. There are also indications that the

composer was not a native speaker of Nabataean but rather an Arab who was attempting to

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[6] Isaac (1992), 239. See also D.F. Graf, "Qura 'Arabiyya and Provincia Arabia," *Geographie historique au Proche-Orient*, in *Notes et monographies techniques* 23, *CNRS* (Paris, 1987).

[7] This town was located 35 miles south-southwest of Bostra on the *Strata Diocletiana*.

[8] *PAES*, Division IV, Semitic Inscriptions, Section A, Nabataean Inscriptions, "Umm idj-Djimal," No. 41, E. Littmann, ed. (Leiden, 1913), 34-56; *Nabatean Inscriptions from the Southern Hauran,* in *PAES*, E. Littmann, ed. (Leiden, 1914); *CIS*. 2.192. See further commentary by E. Littmann in M. de Vogue, ed., *Florilegium*, 386-390; Sartre (1982), 134, n. 50.

[9] In Arabic sources Gadhimat al-Abrash, chief of the tribe of Tanukh.

match Nabataean characters to Arabic words without an exact knowledge of language.[10] This inscription thus belongs to the same group as the inscription on the tomb of Imru' ul-Qays (dating to 328), which will be discussed further below. Together these inscriptions mark the very beginnings of the transformation from Aramaic Nabataean to an Arabic literary script, with that of Jadhima showing signs of being at an earlier stage in the process.
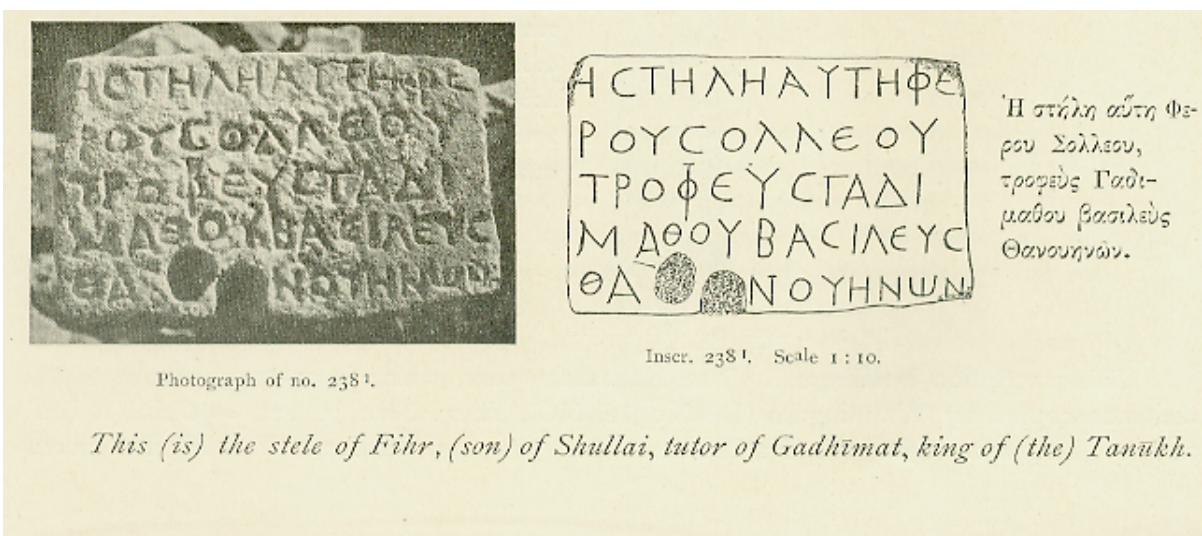

Figure 33: Funerary Inscription of Fihr

[10] Littman (1914), 38.

This inscription presents a number of possible difficulties as a source for the presence of Jadhima and the Tanukh confederacy at this time. First, the exact meaning of *tropheos* in this context is unclear. The term generally means some sort of guardian/mentor, or less commonly a personal attendant or slave.[11] Secondly, the inscription only expressly attests the *tropheos* of Jadhima, and not the king himself, and so there is the question as to how reliably this attests the actual influence of Jadhima and the Tanukh in the region. On this matter, there is disagreement. The majority opinion, led by Bowersock and Sartre,[12] holds the inscription as reliable evidence for such a reading when placed alongside the later Arabic sources, which will be discussed below. However, Shahid points out that we don't know if this is the same Jadhima that is mentioned in the Arabic sources as king of the Tanukh. This objection is somewhat weakened by the fact that there is apparently only one Jadhima mentioned in any of the sources, the one who was king of the Tanukh. Here Jadhima is well known enough in the region of Umm el Jimal c. 250 for him to be commemorated by his *tropheos.*

Finally, only one other surviving contemporary source mentions either Jadhima or the Tanukh specifically, namely a mid-third century Persian inscription attesting the homeland of the

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[11] John Chrysostom, *Scriptura ecclesiastica,* 62.685.40: *"γὰρ, ἔνθα πατὴρ ἐφέστηκε καὶ μήτηρ καὶ παιδαγω- γὸς καὶ τροφεὺς καὶ διδάσκαλος καὶ ἡλικιῶται, καὶ (40) αὐτὴ ἡ τῆς ἐλευθερίας δόξα περικειμένη, καὶ πολλὰ."* Aelius Aristides, *Orationes,* 25.3: "ἀπέλαυσα λόγου ἀξίας. ὃ δ᾽ εἶπον περὶ τῆς φθόης, ἐπεσημήνατο ὕστερον πρὸς τὸν νεωκόρον ὁ θεός, ὡς αὐτὸς ἐμοὶ διηγεῖτο ὁ Ἀσκληπιακός, οὐδὲν παρ᾽ ἐμοῦ προακηκοώς· ἔφη γὰρ ἀκοῦσαι τοῦ θεοῦ λέγοντος ὡς ἄρα φθόην μὲν καὶ κατάρρουν περιῃρηκὼς εἴη μου, τὸν δὲ στόμαχον ἰῷτο. ἐν δὲ δὴ καὶ Νηρίτῳ ἐνὶ τῶν ἐμῶν περὶ τὸν αὐτὸν μάλιστα χρόνον θαυμαστὰ οἷα ἐνεδείξατο. οἶμαι γὰρ δόξαι τὸν θεὸν αὐτῷ λέγειν ἅμα τῷ Τελεσφόρῳ γενόμενον, βλέποντα εἰς ἐμέ, ὡς ἄρα τούτου τά τε ὀστᾶ δέοι ἐξελεῖν καὶ νεῦρα ἐνθεῖναι, τὰ γὰρ ὄντα ἀπειρηκέναι· καὶ αὐτὸν μὲν δὴ ἐν παντὶ εἶναι καὶ ἀγωνιᾶν, ταῦτα." See Aelius Aristides, *Orationes*, 2 vols., trans. C.A. Behr (Leiden, 1981-83).

[12] G.W. Bowersock, "Mavia, Queen of the Saracens," *Studien zur antiken Sozialgeschichte; Festschrift Friedrich Vittinghoff,* Kolner historische Abhandlungen, 28 (Cologne, 1980), 477-95; M. Sartre, "Le tropheus de Gadhimat, roi de Tanukh: Une survivance en Arabie d'une institution hellenistique," *Liber Annuus* 29 (1979), pp. 253-58.

Tanukh, describing this zone as consisting of "provinces of Persia and the land of the Tanukh."[13] Indeed, it was in fact Sassanid pressure which helped to strengthen the Tanukh alliance during this period and augmented the coalition with new peoples fleeing across the Persian frontiers in the wake of Sassanid campaigns.[14]

The silence of the Greco-Roman literary sources is no surprise, since, as noted above, they are notoriously inspecific during this period when discussing nomadic peoples of this region who were involved in conflicts or relations with Rome, preferring the generic term "saracens." Moreover, as will be discussed below, Arabic sources indicate that the name Tanukh was a term used to denote grand confederacy of various peoples, and so might have been passed over in favor of noting individual peoples within the confederacy. An example of this might be the Paikuli inscription which lists individually by name all of the client peoples of the Persian King, Narseh. More on this inscription below.

Further context and confirmation of these inscriptions are given in the Arabic source Hisham al-Kalbi.[15] Tabari, using Hisham as a source, gives the origins of the so-called 'al-

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[13] J. Ryckmans, "Le texte Sharafaddin, Yemen, p. 44 bas, droite," *Le Museon* 80 (1967), 508-12.

[14] Tabari, *Tarikh*, Vol. 2, 42; and 1.749 where Tabari referes to the Tanukh as *arab al-dahiyya*, or the "frontier arabs."

[15] An Arab historian active during the late eighth to early ninth centuries, some centuries after the events at hand in this paper. Further, the part of his work which dealt with these confederacies is only preserved in an even later source, the *Tarikh* of Tabari, a Persian spanning the ninth to tenth centuries. Tabari, *Tarikh*, 10 vols., M. Ibrahim, ed. (Cairo, 1960-69). As unpromising as this source tradition sounds, it has been the object of intense scrutiny and the general conclusion of scholars is that Tabari's representation of Hisham is quite accurate, including copying and quoting long passages, and that, in turn, Hisham's work, which he based closely upon diverse primary sources collected first hand in the Lakhmid capital of al-Hira, is of solid and reliable quality for this period. Indeed, the details found in parts of Tabari which follow Hisham have proven accurate when checked against the known epigraphical evidence. These sources included literary records, inscriptions associated with the dynasty, as well as poems recounting the reign of this family. Tabari, *Tarikh*, Vol. I, 627-28.; I. Shahid, *Byzantium and the Arabs in the Fourth Century* (Washington D.C., 1984), 355ff. See also Hisham al-Kalbi, *Gamharat an-Nasab: Das genealogische Werk des Hisham ibn Muhammad al-Kalbi*, 2 vols., W. Caskel, ed. (Leiden, 1960); The definitive critical survey of Hisham and other Persian/Arabic authors as a source for the history of the Lakhmids is found in G. Rothstein, *Die Dynastie der*

Tanukh, which means literally 'the abode.' It was indeed an extensive alliance of independent desert peoples. According to Hisham, the confederacy came into being when overpopulation and competition over resources forced several peoples out of the area of al-Hirah and al-Anbar into the surrounding desert areas of the Syrian frontiers. Eventually, these peoples formed together into a partnership, both for mutual defense and greater effectiveness in raids. This confederacy eventually came to function much like a single entity. When they had grown sufficiently strong, they began to take the offensive against the regional Arsacid princes, who were weakened by continual warfare among themselves. These offensives became major incursions into Mesopotamia itself,[16] leading to the cementing of control over the transitional desert zone from the west bank of the Euphrates into Syria and Bahrain.

It was during this pre-Sassanid period that the confederacy gained its first central rulers, from among the Azd people, whose leader was Fahm.[17] Three sons of Fahm held the reign in succession: Malik, followed by 'Amr and finally its most successful leader, Jadhima. Putting the Arabic sources into the equation along with the epigraphic sources allows us to present a tentative picture of the Tanukh in the region. First, the location of the Jadhima inscription in Umm al-Jimal, well within Roman territory and itself a legionary base is notable. It may indicate that the influence of the Tanukh under Jadhima extended into this part of the Roman frontier from the third century, at least by virtue of the element of notoriety extended to Jadhima by the author of the inscription. Sassanid pressure on the frontiers from the mid-third century, including

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Lahmiden in al-Hira (Berlin, 1899) The most recent comprehensive survey of the source tradition is found in I. Shahid (1984). See also another classic study, T. Noldeke, *Die Geschicte der Perser und Araber zur Zeit der Sassaniden* (Leiden, 1879).

[16] Tabari, *Tarikh,*1.744ff; *Aghani*, 9.159ff.; Hamza al-Isfahani, *Tarikh,* 94ff.

[17] Tabari, *Tarikh,* 1.750ff.

the nomadic peoples, provided good motivation for the Tanukh and other nomads to move into the Roman zone. Beyond the Sassanid motivation, evidence suggests that the frontier nomads had already had occasion to ally with Rome in her conflicts with the great regional power of Palmyra earlier in the third century. At any rate, events of this period would be crucial to the fate of the Roman town of Umm el-Jimal, leading to its destruction in the wars which ensued.[18]

Palmyra itself came within the Roman sphere of influence in the second century when Trajan annexed it, and Roman troops were stationed there.[19] Palmyra was strategically located on the caravan routes and her strong military allowed the city both to protect and tax the trade routes as well as remain independent of Persian interference. Over time, Palymra became a crucial ally of Rome, serving as a buffer against the power of the New Persian Empire. Palmyra's leadership acquired official status of a high degree, culminating in the third century, when the imperial vicissitudes of the Period of Crisis caused a power vacuum in the east which would be filled by the Romanized ruling class of Palmyra. In particular, the Persian capture of the Emperor Valerian in 260 threw the weight of responsibility for defense onto the shoulders of King Odenaethus of Palymra.[20] Odenaethus intercepted Shapur on his return from Carrhae and inflicted heavy casualties on the Persian army. In the following year he defeated two imperial pretenders at Emesa, in support of the Emperor Gallienus. As a result, he was rewarded with

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[18] See discussion in chapter on static defenses.

[19] The first garrison was a cavalry *ala*. Military diplomas also document the service of Palmyrene archers as auxiliaries in Trajan's army. See Isaac (1990) 144.

[20] Odenaethus already assumed the title *vir consularis* by 258, and then the titles *restitutor totius Orientalis* and *mlk mlk'* or "King of Kings" following his victories over the Persians in the 260's. *Historia Augusta,* 10.1-2: "Gallieno et Saturnine consulibus Odenathus rex Palymrenorum obtinuit totius orientis imperium idcirco praecipue quod se fortibus factis dignum tantae maiestatis infulis declaravit, Gallieno aut nullas aut luxuriosas aut ineptas et ridiculas res agente." See *Historia Augusta*, 3 vols., trans. D. Magie, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA, 1921-32).

command of all the Roman armies of the east. Odenaethus then initiated a series of brilliant

offensives which not only drove the Persians out of Roman territory, but penetrated deep within

Persia itself.[21] The assassination of both Odenaethus and Hairan in 266/7 brought Odenaethus's

second son Vabalathus to the throne, but the real ruler became his mother and regent, Queen

Zenobia.[22] Zenobia launched a series of campaigns into Roman territory which resulted in nearly

all of the Roman east being absorbed into a new Palmyrene Empire from Egypt to Asia Minor.

Palmyra's shift from ally of the Romans to an independent power brought Zenobia into

conflict with other regional powers as well, and perhaps even the Tanukh confederacy of

Jadhima. Palmyra's strategic position had long caused conflicts with the nomads of the

surrounding desert regions, particularly the large and powerful Tanukh. Tabari relates that, prior

to his death, probably sometime in the late 260's or early 270's, Jadhima had consolidated

Tanukh control over the desert regions west of the Euphrates prior to the rise of Zenobia,

pushing out other major nomad contenders.[23] According to Tabari, Jadhima fought an

engagement with an Arab leader in the region of Palmyra, a 'Amr ibn Zarib. (not to be confused

with the Lakhmid 'Amr) In the melee, Jadhima killed 'Amr bin Zarib. This 'Amr had a daughter

named Na'ilia, or Zabba, who became a queen in the area of Palmyra. When Zabba eventually

rose to the throne, she sought revenge against Jadhima. However, receiving counsel against

attacking Jadhima militarily, she requested a parlay with him during which she ambushed and

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[21] Isaac (1990), 220-21.

[22] Vabalathus took the titles *corrector totius Orientis*, "King of Kings," *vir clarissimus, consul, dux Romanorum*, and *imperator*. Zenobia eventually took the title *Augusta*. Such titles obviously point to their usurpation of imperial rank within the East, and the breakaway nature of the Palmyrene Empire in general during this period. See Isaac (1990), 222.

[23] Tabari, *Tarikh,* 1.756ff.

captured him. She then executed him by opening his veins. When news of this treachery reached

the Tanukh, his nephew, the Lakhmid 'Amr ibn 'Adi, now ruler of the Tanukh confederacy,

attacked Zabba's city and killed her when she tried to escape.

Jadhima was clearly contemporary with Odenaethus and his struggles with Shapur II.[24]

There is no record of Jadhima or the Tanukh having been in Persian service as federates at this

time. Indeed, this would have been unlikely considering what is known of Sassanid pressure on

nomadic peoples during the period and the fact that the Tanukh seem to have moved out of the

Persian zone of control and further westward towards the Roman zone of influence. The question

of whether Jadhima had a role in the events surrounding Odenaethus is unclear. Odenaethus used

nomadic allies in his campaigns against Shapur in 272, though there is no direct evidence for the

specific identity of these units.[25] However, Arabic accounts state that the Tanukh did aid

Aurelian in his campaign against Zenobia.[26] These events may explain the destruction of the

earlier village at Umm el-Jimal, as attested in the archaeological record of the site,[27] the town

becoming a casuality of struggle among Rome, Palmyra and Persia.

Tabari relates that Jadhima's successor, and nephew, 'Amr ibn Adi further strengthened

the Tanukh hold over the desert and marked a shift of dynastic control from the Azd clan to the

Lakhmid. This was done by defeating and executing the Arab queen Zabba, the murderer of

Jadhima and last major nomadic competitor of the Tanukh in the region.[28] The rise of 'Amr as

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[24] Reigned 241-72.

[25] Isaac (1990), 220.

[26] Baladuri, *Futuh al-Buldan*, 2 vols., S. Munajjid, ed. (Cairo, 1956), 155-56.

[27] De Vries (1989), 230.

[28] Tabari, *Tarikh*, 1.756ff.

leader of the Tanukh coincided with the rise of Zenobia in Palmyra. In terms of the struggle with Zenobia, as Sartre notes, it was only in the best interests of their regional power for the Tanukh to see her fall, and thus to back the Roman position.[29]

Therefore, if there was such a thing as a universal motivating factor for Tanukh policy, it was to strengthen their position vis-a-vis other nomads, the Persians in the east and the Romans in the west. The strength of the nomads was their ability to operate in and control a harsh geographical region which no other power could effectively control, Roman or Persian. The nomad coalitions, especially the Tanukh, were valuable commodities and both sides sought them as allies. The nomads were in a position to take advantage of both as suited their interests of the moment. That the nomads could exercise the freedom to shift allegiances at any given time can not be understated here and underscores their significant independent power in the transitional desert zones. Umm el-Jimal may exemplify a geographic link in this relationship between the nomads and the Roman defensive zone.

Of prime importance here is the unprecedented existence and numbers of Safaitic texts in a town setting. The Safaitic script and language of these texts is unique to the nomadic peoples of the region from the first century onward. With the exception of Umm el-Jimal, in this region of the frontier, such inscriptions are only found far from areas of permanent settlement in the open desert, such as at campsites and oases. Moreover, at Umm el-Jimal, such inscriptions are also often uniquely accompanied by a bilingual translation in Nabataean script. They are applied here in an urban setting to dedications of funerary markers/structures, or residences.[30]

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[29] Sartre (2005), 135ff.

[30] *PAES,* Division IV. Semitic inscriptions, Section C. Safaitic inscriptions, vii-viii.

Figure 34: Safaitic Inscription: "Belonging to Hamm b. Aus and Hirr b. Murr"

Scale 1 : 20
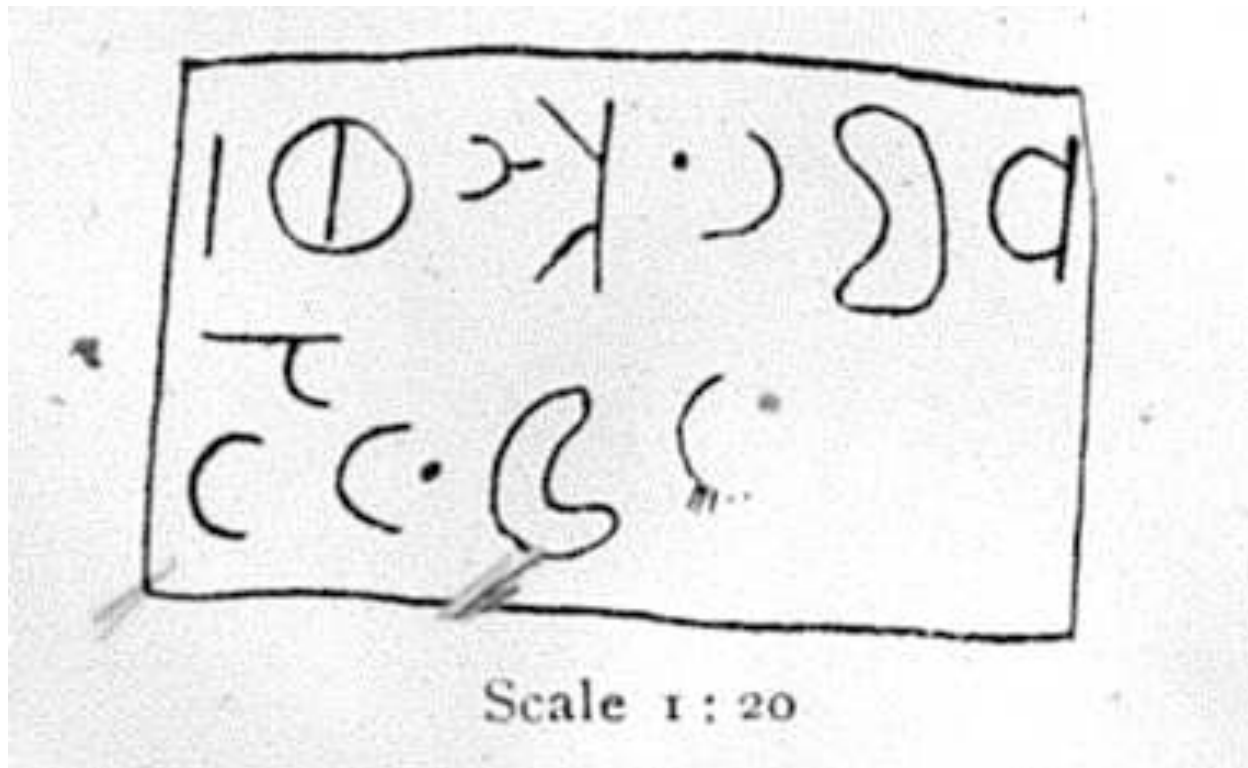
Figure 35: Safaitic Inscription

The Safaitic texts denote the direct presence of nomads in the town setting, the adaptation of their epigraphic conventions to this context and, via the Nabataean translations, to the dominant culture of the settled zone at that time. The fact that this practice is rarely attested elsewhere in the region indicates a unique relationship between the nomadic peoples of the desert and those of Umm el-Jimal. The more difficult question is the exact nature of the contact. The inscriptions give no indictions of exactly which peoples were present in the town. Further, were they living there on a more permanent basis, or only transient, perhaps with familial links to residents of the town? Their bilingual nature points to an attempt to bridge the cultures of the nomad and the town, however. These Safaitic texts resonate with the bilingual text of Jadhima from Umm el-Jimal as well as that of Imru' ul-Qays discussed below.

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The fourth century saw a refortification of Umm el-Jimal in the form of a new *castellum* during the tetrarchic era.[31] This was a completely self-contained and, more importantly, self-sufficient fort. So, it needed to be, since there is no evidence to suggest that adjoining village itself was rebuilt after its destruction in the wars with Palmyra. This refortification suggests a new threat, which in part may be explained by the change of the leadership of the Tanukh confederacy from Jadhima to 'Amr, who seemed to have held at least nominal alliance with the Persians in the final decade of the third century. (See figure below.) This is supported by the inscriptional evidence as well as the Arab accounts.
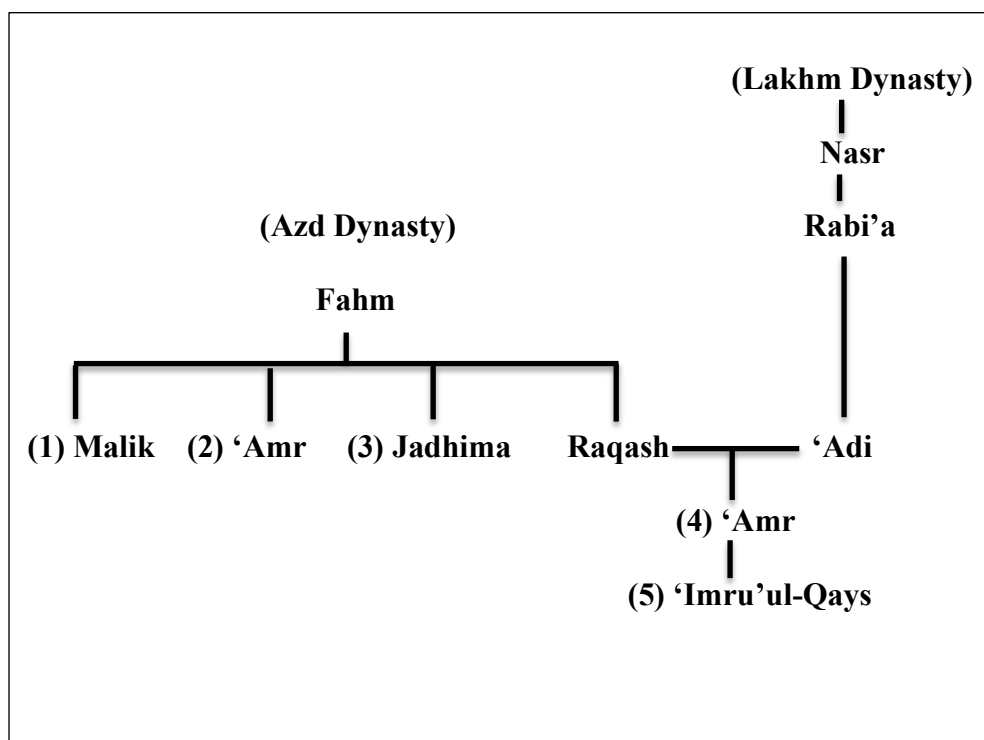

Figure 36: Genealogy of Imru'ul-Qays

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[31] B. de Vries, "Umm el-Jimal in the first three centuries A.D.," in P. Freeman and D. Kennedy, eds., *The Defense of the Roman and Byzantine East*, British Archeaological Reports International Series 297 (Oxford, 1986), 231-32.

The so-called Paikuli inscription from Persia indicates that during at least part of the reign of Narseh, 'Amr was actually a client-king of the Persians.[32] Lines 3.91-94 name "'Amr, King of the Lahmids" as among the viceroys of Narseh. The purpose of the inscription was to justify his usurpation of the throne.

> And Caesar and the Romans were in gratitude(?) and peace and friendship with me.

> And the King of Kušān, [and ...] Aspnay(?), and the King of Xwārizm, and D/Zāmadīgp[utr?] the [...] bed of Kwšd'n ... and Pgrymbk [...], and Sēd(?) the Šyk'n of Harēw, and Pāk Mehmān, and Birwān Spandwardān, and the King of Pāradān, and King Rāzgurd, and King Pndplnk, and the King of Makurān, and the King of Tūrān, [and] the King [..., and] the King of [Gur]gān|[Balāsa]gān, and the King of Mskyt'n, and the King of Iberia, and the King of Sigān, and King Tirdād, and Amru King of the Lahmids, and Amru [King of] the Abgars(?), ...

The Paikuli inscription also meshes with the evidence of Hisham who states that 'Amr had at times been an independent ruler and at other times a viceroy of the Persians.[33] The exact date of this switch is unknown, but Narseh ruled from 293-302, which means that 'Amr must have been under Persian suzerainty (whatever that entailed in this case) at the time of Narseh's death in 302.

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[32] Frye (1983), 703; *The Sassanian Inscription of Paikuli*, H. Humbach, P.O. Skjaervo, eds. (Wiesbaden, 1978).

[33] Tabari, *Tarikh*, 627.
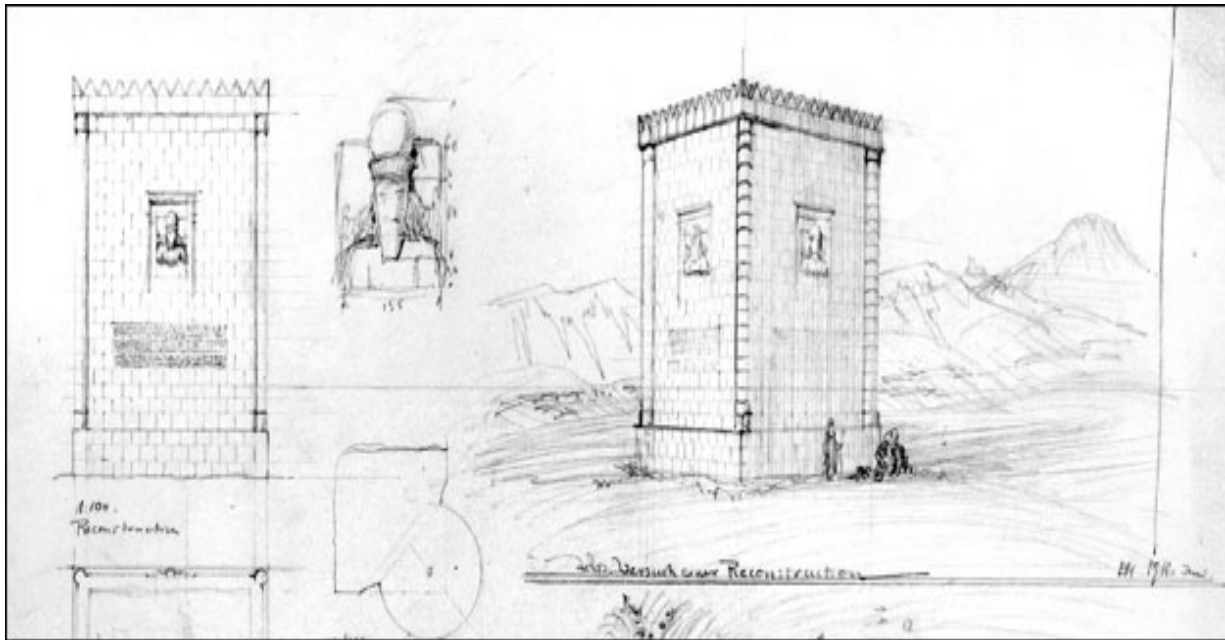
Figure 37: Paikuli Inscription

This situation also resonates with mention of an expedition of Diocletian against Saracens on the edge of Syria which took place in 290.[34] Apparently Diocletian successfully repelled this threat, but it is intriguing that the *augustus* himself would have deemed it necessary to pursue this campaign in person if it were just a band of desert raiders. Some more significant threat must have been at hand, and perhaps 'Amr, an ally of the Persians, fits into it in some way. There is no way to know for certain since there are no further details of the expedition and it is otherwise unattested.[35] The Persians certainly considered the 'Amr's Lakhmid state a part of the Persian

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[34] *Panegyrici Latini*, 11.5.4: "…omitto Sarmatiae vastationem oppressumque captivitatis vinculis Saracenum…" Diocletian's campaign against the Saracens took place in 290. See *In Praise of Later Roman Emperors: The Panegyrici Latini*, trans. and comm. R.A.B. Mynors (Berkeley, 1994).

[35] Kennedy and Riley (1990), 42.

empire, and an important buffer against Rome, and a key ally.[36] However, a major shift in the

balance-of-power in Arabia occurred in the early fourth century. The Lakhmids switched

allegiance to the Romans, as a very important inscription discovered at al-Namarah, the site of a

Roman defensive fort of the *Strata Diocletiana*, attests.[37] The 'Namarah inscription' is carved

into the monumental basalt lintel above the entrance to the mausoleum of Imru' ul-Qays I, son of

'Amr, and King of all the Arabs. (See photo below.) The date-of-death on this inscription, given

in Arabic form as 7 Kaslul of the year 223 (of the era of Bostra), corresponds to December 328

C.E. The inscription further records the King's major titles and victories, the most resounding of

which remarks that his viceroys became *phylarchs* of the Romans.[38] This inscription is the

earliest extant contemporary reference to this ruler and is also interestingly the second oldest

example of classical Arabic (written in Nabatean characters).[39]

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[36] Frye (1983), 139.

[37] Located approximately one hundred kilometers south of the present city of Damascus, in the Wadi l-Sawt. Another kilometer to the southeast lie the ruins of the mausoleum of Imru' ul-Qays I, son of 'Amr, and King of all the Arabs, attested as such by what is now known as the Namarah inscription. Since its discovery in 1901 by Rene Dussaud and Frederic Macler, the details of the reading of the "Namarah inscription" were a subject of some controversy, until the Arabist James Bellamy put a rest to the debate surrounding its remaining *cruces* in two articles of 1985 and 1987. See J. Bellamy, "A New Reading of the Namarah Inscription," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 105 (1985), 31-48; J. Bellamy, "Imru' ul-Qays I and Imru' ul-Qays II," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 32:2 (Autumn, 1987), 315.

[38] *Phylarchus* was a title of rank given to tribal chiefs on the Eastern frontier who commanded a zone of the *limes* which corresponded to that of the Roman *dux*. Each phylarch was also usually given a rank in the official Roman heirarchy of the Late Empire. See Jones (1964), 611.

[39] After the En- Avdat inscription which has two lines in early Arabic (also written in Nabatean characters), and which dates between the late first and early second centuries C.E. See J. A. Bellamy, "Arabic Verses from The First/Second Century: The Inscription Of `En `Avdat," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 35 (1990), 73-79.

(a)

(b)

Figure 38: Namarah Inscription

The desert regions of Arabia were thus part of the struggle between Persia and Rome. Nomadic peoples here were part of the balance-of-power which existed along the frontiers. These Arab powers waged their own independent raids into Persian and Roman territory, but they became much more dangerous enemies when they were employed as elements in the overall strategic conflict. Their skills as highly mobile guerilla fighters and ability to operate in conditions unsuitable for conventional Persian and Roman forces made them valuable allies for both sides.[40] The late fourth century Roman historian Ammianus Marcellinus is the first to mention major actions involving the nomads. In almost all cases they involve nomads attached to either the Persians or the Romans. Ammianus had been a commander under the emperor Julian (361-3) and possessed first hand experience of the Saracens and comments on their character and fighting abilities.[41] Ammianus particularly admires their skillful use of guerilla tactics, which on the other hand made them unsuited to set-piece battles, as here fighting as Roman allies against the Goths.[42]

> (5) A troop of Saracens (of whose origin and customs I have spoken at length in various places), who are more adapted to stealthy raiding expeditions than to pitched battles, and had recently been summoned to the city, desiring to attack the horde of barbarians of which they had suddenly caught sight, rushed forth boldly from the city to attack them. The contest was long and obstinate, and both sides separated on equal terms. (6) But the oriental troop had the advantage from a strange event, never witnessed before. For one of their number, a man with long hair and naked except for a loin-cloth, uttering hoarse and dismal cries, with drawn dagger rushed into the thick of the Gothic army, and after killing a man applied his lips to his throat and sucked the blood that poured out. The barbarians,

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[41] Ammianus Marcellinus, *Res gestae*, trans. J.C. Rolfe, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA, 1935-39).

[42] Ammianus, *Res gestae*, 31.16.5: "Saracenorum cuneus super quorum origine moribusque diversis in locis rettulimus plura ad furta magis expeditionalium rerum quam ad concursatorias habilis pugnas, recens illuc accersitus, congressurus barbarum globo repente conspecto a civitate fidenter erupit, diuque extento certamine pertinaci, aequis partes discessere momentis**."**

terrified by this strange and monstrous sight, after that did not show their usual self-confidence when they attempted any action, but advanced with hesitating steps.

Persia is also known to have resettled Arab tribes along its frontiers as a defense against other Arab tribes, including those allied with Rome.[43]

The vacillation of the Lakhmids between Rome and Persia proves that these alliances could change swiftly and the balance of power along with them. Thus, the desert frontiers of Rome were, in effect, an extension of the frontiers with Persia, and so were a potential battleground in the Romano-Persian rivalry. The strengthening of these frontiers by Diocletian in the late third century, and their maintenance by Constantine in the fourth are responses to the nature of the conflict. What were the dynamics underlying the change of situation in Arabia in the late third century, such that nomads rose to the forefront of affairs in the region? The first factor was a change in the settlement patterns of desert nomads. This process, known as 'bedouinization', saw a gradual diminishing of urbanism from the time of the early Principate. Hitherto, a town-based aristocracy had held sovereignty over the population. This balance of power shifted over time to the rulers of the nomads.[44] A second factor was the aforementioned shift in balance of power caused by the destruction of Hatra and Palmyra in the course of the Persian Wars of the third century comes into importance here. As discussed before, this created a power vacuum which large confederacies, such as the Tanukh and Lakhmids, filled. These large confederacies were already becoming powerful while Hatra and Palmyra still existed. This is shown by the fact that 'Amr and his forces were able to overcome the Palmyrene queen, Zenobia.

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[43] Kennedy and Riley (1990), 37.

[44] Tabari, *Tarikh*, Vol. 2, 42; and Vol. 1, pg. 612 where Tabari refers to the Tanukh as *arab al-dahiyya*, or the "frontier arabs."

Finally, political and religious trends within the Persian and Roman spheres in the late third century had great ramifications for nomadic peoples in the region. Persia was undergoing a revolution under the ambitious Sasanian dynasty. The government moved to tighten control over internal the internal political structure. This included taking direct central control over client states which had formerly held allied status.[45] This policy especially applied to those client states on the frontiers, such as in Syria and Arabia. The beginning of this move under Narseh fits perfectly with the Tanukh/Roman alliance of Jadhima. The Tanukh consisted of a confederation of peoples settled in the area of northeast Arabia near al-Qatif. Apparently, the peoples which formed this confederacy had fled their homelands in Persia to escape the rule of the New Persians.[46]

These details are confirmed in an inscription dated to the first half of the third century which describes this area as holding 'provinces of Persia and the land of the Tanukh'.[47] After leaving Persian territory, they ended up on the Roman frontier near Arabia Petraea, allied with the Romans against Persia.[48] This centralizing of control also corresponds with the campaigns of Shapur II into Arabia in the early fourth century, which put pressure on the very lands ruled by Imru' ul-Qays, who subsequently allied himself with the Romans. Persian political policies were driving these nomadic peoples into the arms of the Romans on the other side of the frontier.

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[45] J. Ryckmans, "Le texte Sharafaddin, Yemen, p. 44 bas, droite," *Le Museon* 80 (1967), 508-12.

[46] Frye (1983), 136. A tactic used by Shapur to subdue the desert tribes was to fill their wells with sand.

[47] Frye (1983), 138-9.

[48] Full discussion in F. Millar, *The Roman Near East 31 BC-AD 337* (London, 1993), 212ff.; F. Millar, "Empire, community and culture in the Roman Near East: Greeks, Syrians, Jews and Arabs," *Journal of Jewish Studies* 38 (1987), 143-64.

Furthermore, Shapur II instituted systematic religious persecution aimed at strengthening the traditional Zoroastrian church.[49] The religious persecution would have directly effected Manichean Christians within the Lakhmid state, of which 'Amr and Imru' ul-Qays were known protectors. This coupled with the evidence that Imru' ul-Qays himself was Christian creates a powerful motivation to abandon Persia, and it was during this very period that Imru' ul-Qays is attested as becoming an ally of the (Christian) Constantine. Recall also that Imru' ul-Qays's father 'Amr had left his alliance with Rome after the victory over Palmyra in 273. This corresponds to the period when Diocletian began persecuting Manicheans and Christians in the area.[50] Therefore, the religious persecutions of both Diocletian and the Sassanid kings were clearly having an impact on the nomads' choice of political and military allies at this time.

The religious factor supported Constantine's choice of Imru' ul-Qays. All the ways in which Constantine actively promoted Christianity need not be listed here. It is sufficient to say that the Christians of the eastern frontiers did not want for imperial largess at this time. The religious policy became a political one which also affected Constantine's relations with federate peoples as well. For example, his reign saw the conversion of the Armenian King Tiridates III (298-330) to Christianity by St. Gregory the Illuminator. [51] The nomadic peoples took advantage of the conflict between the Persians and the Romans. Their growing power made them valuable allies, and they allied themselves with the side which offered them the best situation at the moment. The Roman fortifications in Arabia are there because the desert was not an inactive zone in the conflict with Persia. Indeed, the evidence shows that the zone was alive with both the

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[49] Frye (1983), 131.

[50] Jones (1964), 85; Shahid (1984), 33.

[51] Isaac (1990), 73.

friends and enemies of the Romans. Moreover, the situation in this 'broad transitional zone' was always in flux. Even during the time of overt peace between Rome and Persia, from 298-337, significant events were shaping Arabia and its defensive situation. Just because 'hot' war was not taking place does not mean that a 'cold' war in the desert was not. However, by the time of Constantine's death, the frontiers appeared to be under the dominant influence of Rome.

Thus, Constantine showed continuity in adopting the defensive system of his predecessors, and innovation in the settlement of Imru' ul-Qays's Arab confederacy within the defensive structure of the Late Empire, pointing to the future trend of entrusting frontier defenses increasingly to *foederati*, preferably Christian ones. In 325 Constantine emerged victorious over his last rival, Licinius, to become the first sole emperor of Rome since the accession of Diocletian in 284. A single emperor now bore full responsibility for the military defenses of the empire for the first time in decades. The literary sources declare that Constantine met this challenge by stripping the frontiers of their legions, which had been placed there by Diocletian (r. 284-305) and created a series of large mobile army units behind the front lines, to become officially known as *comitatenses*. While there is certainly evidence that Constantine (at times) raised large field armies, presumably at the expense of the frontier garrisons,[52] archaeological and epigraphic evidence along the frontier in Arabia does not support the theory of such a practice in this sector. Indeed, upon closer examination, there are indications that Constantine did in fact continue and maintain the building program begun even before Diocletian in Arabia.[53]

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[52] Zosimus, *Historia nova*, 2.15, reports that Constantine combined troops from Britain with units from Gauls and Germans from the Rhine to form the army with which he opposed Maxentius at the Milvian bridge. Furthermore, Zosimus (2.22) states that Constantine raised an army of 120,000 infantry and 10,000 cavalry for the showdown with Licinius. Although these are probably exaggerated numbers, Constantine must have raised the large numbers of troops needed in these campaigns from units of existing garrisons.

[53] See discusssion in chapter 2.

Moreover, he continued his predecessors' policy of relying on a large number of smaller legionary forces supplemented by small units of mobile cavalry reserves at strategic locations. Thus, evidence for a major change of defensive policy in Arabia under Constantine is lacking.

The defensive situation in Arabia during this period is further evidence that Constantine used an ad hoc approach.[54] He geared this policy in Arabia to the defensive demands of the moment. First, Constantine had no immediate need to counter Persia, since he had inherited a peace treaty with this dangerous foe. However, he had to anticipate more trouble from them eventually, although the peace would not be broken until 337. Second, Constantine himself was involved in dealing with threats from the Visigoths and Sarmatians on the Danube, inflicting several defeats upon them. It follows then that he would have wanted to guard against potential threats from Persia in the east and nomads in the South, until the Danubian frontier was secured, while not drawing upon major Roman forces to accomplish this. Constantine met these demands by continuing the basic defensive structure already in use.

In addition, there is evidence that Constantine was actively aligning himself with native federate leaders, who would form yet another facet of his defensive structure in the east. As Persia became swept up in the whirlwind of religious and political revival, it increasingly pressured those outside its borders through repeated incursions and alienated important groups within its borders through attempts at tighter internal control. Furthermore, the aftermath of the series of wars between Persia, Rome and the subsequent fall of powerful states such as Palmyra and Hatra ultimately created a power vacuum.

This vacuum was to be filled by large confederacies of nomadic peoples. Many of the peoples which formed these confederacies occupied power bases in the adjacent desert areas,

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[54] Poidebard (1934), 27-94.

both threatening and aiding Persia and Rome at various times. This series of events provided

Constantine and his predecessors with a good motivation to ally themselves with these

confederacies as a way in which to supplement their defensive buffer along the Arabian frontier.

This hypothesis fits especially with the reign of Constantine, since the recruitment of powerful

foederati accords with what we know of his policies of defense, foreign relations and religion

during this period. Moreover, the increased use of *foederati* foreshadows the late Roman trend of

coopting native units, under non-Roman command, in greater and greater numbers. Thus, the

Namarah inscription combined with the sources for Jadhima and the Tanukh confederacy

indicate that Roman connections and extension of power in the greater region of Arabia had been

developing consistently stronger from Marcus Aurelius through Constantine, when they seem to

have incorporated influence over much of Arabia. Also, Jadhima and Imru' ul Qays well

represent the concept of *foederati*, which would be further institutionalized into the late fourth

centuries and beyond.

Arab *Foederati* in the Late Fourth through Sixth Centuries

The apparent involvement of the Romans with larger groups of peoples under the banner

of confederacies, and even the mention of specific confederacies during the third and fourth

centuries contrasts with the early empire, whose sources only mention the Arab nomads under

the vague and generic term 'saracens'. The increased mention of and role of Arabs in Roman

affairs seems to coincide with the development of these larger native confederations, a reason

why nomadic peoples appear more often and more prominently in the sources. The greater

potential power of these unified groups made them more valuable allies for the Persians and

Romans, and a more significant source of trouble outside of alliances.[55] The net result of these developments is that the use of nomad forces became institutionalized in the armies of both the Romans and the Persians in the fourth century. Open hostilities resumed between Rome and Persia in 337. Ammianus Marcellinus, who served in these wars under the emperor Julian well documents the events. While campaigning against the Persians in Mesopotamia, Saracen units swore allegiance to emperor Julian.[56]

> (8) The next day he [Julian] marched on from there along the brow of the river-banks, since the waters were rising from streams flowing in on all sides and kept on with his armed force until he came to an outpost, where he encamped. There the princes of the Saracen nations as suppliants on bended knees presented him with a golden crown and did obeisance to him as lord of the world and of its peoples; and they were gladly received, since they were adapted for guerilla warfare.

At other times, Saracen units fought on the Persian side against the Romans.[57]

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[55] See Jerome, *Epistulae* 165.2: "Moreover when I had, in the course of this year, prepared three books of the *Commentary*, a sudden furious invasion of the barbarous tribes mentioned by your Virgil as *"the widely roaming Barcæi"* and by sacred Scripture in the words concerning Ishmael, *"He shall dwell in the presence of his brethren"* (Genesis 16.12) swept over the whole of Egypt, Palestine, Phenice, and Syria, carrying all before them with the vehemence of a mighty torrent, so that it was only with the greatest difficulty that we were enabled, by the mercy of Christ, to escape their hands." Written c. 410 C.E. See Jerome, *Epistulae*, trans. J.G. Cunningham, in P. Schaff, ed., *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series*, Vol. 1 (Buffalo, NY, 1887)

[56] Ammianus, *Res gestae*, 23.3.8: "Luce vero secuta profectus exinde per supercilia riparum fluvialium aquis adulescentibus undique convenis cum armigera gradiens manu in statione quadam sub pellibus mansit, ubi Saracenarum reguli gentium genibus supplices nixi oblata ex auro corona tamquam mundi nationumque suarum dominum adorarunt, suscepti gratanter ut ad furta bellorum adpositi…"

[57] Ammianus, *Res gestae*, 25.1.3: "Et cum fatiscerent vix toleranda aestuum magnitudine crebrisque congressibus partes, ad ultimum hostiles turmae gravi sunt repulsa discussae. Hinc recedentibus nobis longius Saraceni nostrorum metu peditum repedare conpulsi, paulo post innexi Persarum multitudine ocius inruebant, Romana inpedimenta rapturi, verum viso imperatore ad alas subsidiarias reverterunt." See also 25.8.1: "Et pax specie humanitatis indulta in perniciem est versa multorum, qui fame ad usque spiritum lacerati postremum, ideoque latenter progressi, aut inperitia nandi gurgite fluminis absorbebantur, aut si undarum vi superata venirent ad ripas, rapti a Saracenis vel Persis, quos, ut diximus paulo ante, exturbavere Germani, cadebantur ut pecora vel longius amendati sunt venundandi." "But the peace which was granted under pretence of humanity caused the destruction of many, who, tormented by hunger up to their last breath, and so going ahead unnoticed by the army, were either, being unskilled in swimming, swallowed up in the depths of the river, or if they mastered the power of the stream and reached the opposite bank, were seized by the Saracens or Persians (who, as I said shortly before, had been routed by the Germans), and were either cut down like so many cattle, or led off farther inland to be sold."

(3) And when, because of the almost unendurable heat and the repeated attacks, both sides were growing weary, finally the enemy's troops were utterly routed and fled in all directions. As we withdrew from the spot, the Saracens followed us for some distance but were forced to retreat through fear of our infantry; a little later they joined with the main body of the Persians and attacked with greater safety, hoping to carry off the Romans' baggage; but on seeing the emperor they returned to the cavalry held in reserve.

Ammianus remarks on the Persians' novel use of nomad forces in 356 to wage guerrilla war on the Romans.[58] As to their quality as allies, Ammianus further states, *Saraceni tamen nec amici nobis nec hostes optandi. . .,* "However, it is uncertain whether the Saracens are our friends or enemies."[59]   Such widespread impact of nomad raids on the population as a whole seems to have been a new development of the fourth century and beyond. Prior to this time there is no significant mention in the sources of nomads being a major problem beyond sporadic raids.[60] This suggests that the now large and well-organized confederacies were either being used more systematically, as Ammianus indicates, or that they were acting so independently. It should be noted that the exact nature and leadership of these "confederacies" is unclear, and probably denotes loose groupings of various peoples held together under the banner of a series of shifting alliances, as indicated by the transfer of power between various dynasties led by prominent nomads, such as that of Jadhima, 'Amr and Imru' ul-Qays discussed above. The fact that the

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[58] Ammianus, *Res gestae,* 16.9.1. Earlier, during 354, Ammianus remarks that the frequency of the raids was such that all of Mesopotamia had to be guarded by *praetenturis et stationibus agrariis*.

[59] Ammianus, *Res gestae*, 14.4.1.

[60] Isaac (1990), 237. Ammianus, *Res gestae*, 14.4.1, remarked colorfully on such raids: "Saraceni tamen nec amici nobis umquam nec hostes optandi, ultro citroque discursantes quicquid inveniri poterat momento temporis parvi vastabant milvorum rapacium similes, qui si praedam dispexerint celsius, volatu rapiunt celeri, aut nisi impetraverint, non inmorantur." Remote monasteries were favorite targets of Saracen raiders and consequently ecclesiastical writers often mention them. See Jerome, *Vita Pauli,* 12: "Stupefactus ergo Antonius, quod de Athanasio et pallio eius audierat, quasi Christum in Paulo uidens et in pectore eius Deum uenerans ultra respondere nihil ausus est, sed cum silentio lacrimans exosculatis eius oculis manibusque ad monasterium, quod postea a Saracenis occupatum est, regrediebatur. Neque uero gressus sequebantur animum, sed cum corpus inane ieiuniis seniles etiam anni frangerent, animo uincebat aetatem."

names of these large confederacies dominate the sources over the dynastic names could be an

example of the Roman propensity to make barbarian peoples into more concrete and discrete

entities through a process of ethnogenesis, not unlike groupings such as the Vandals, Goths,

etc.[61] Thus, it is possible to speak separately of confederacies such as the Tanukh, Lakhm,

Ghassan and Kinda, and dynasties such as the Jafnids, Nasrids and Hujrids, as in the Arabic

sources. The exact correlation between the confederate terms and the family names is unclear

and therefore must be approached with caution.[62]

From this time on, individual nomads are named in the Roman sources for the first time,

which adds yet another layer of complication to that of the confederacy versus the family, since

there is often no indication where an individual fits into the other categories of identity.[63] A

notable fourth century example is a Podosaces, King of the Assaniti, whom Ammianus describes

as the bane of the Roman frontiers on his own and as a Persian ally in 363: *Malechus Podosacis*

nomine, phylarchus Saracenorum Assanitarum, famosi nominis latro, omni saevitia per nostros

limites diu grassatus . . ., "Malechus, under the name Podosacis, a phylarch of Saracen Assaniti,

famous for brigandage, has proceeded across our borders with all savagery for a long time."

(24.2.4)[64] Again, both sides used the nomad forces as light auxiliaries rather than as main units,

a fact to which Ammianus pointedly refers when he remarks on the utter ineffectiveness of the

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[61] See P.J. Geary, "Barbarians and Ethnicity," in G.W. Bowersock (1999), 107-129.

[62] G. Fischer, "The Political Development of the Ghassan between Rome and Iran," *JLA* 1/2 (2008), 252 ff.

[63] Fischer (2008), 254. This due to the fact that when Rome dealy with a larger group of people it favored dealings with a single responsible individual rather than a larger body or state.

[64] See Sartre (2005), 139ff; I. Shahid (1984), 119-23.

nomads in any kind of formal set battle.[65] Evidence also indicates that the Romans paid

protection subsidies to some nomadic powers to keep them in check. For example, Julian had

trouble with nomads beyond the Tigris in 363 because he had refused to pay them their

customary dues as he had in the past.[66] By the mid-fifth century, subsistence payments had

become standard practice, as detailed in a *novella* of 443 which forbids *duces* to misappropriate

or seize any part of the payments to Saracen allies and other allied powers on the eastern

frontiers.[67] This corresponds with the subsistence allowance which the *duces* disbursed to

limitanei on the frontiers. In support of the institutionalization of Arab nomads in the army, by

the fifth century, the *Notitia dignitatum* lists Arab units in prominent roles in the defensive

structure of the east.[68]

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[65] Ammianus, *Res gestae*, 25.2.3: "Ipse autem ad sollicitam suspensamque quietem paulisper protractus cum somno ut solebat depulso, ad aemulationem Caesaris Iulii quaedam sub pellibus scribens obscuro noctis altitudine sensus cuiusdam philosophi teneretur, vidit squalidius, ut confessus est proximis, speciem illam Genii publici, quam, cum ad Augustum surgeret culmen, conspexit in Galliis, velata cum capite Cornucopia per aulaea tristius discedentem."

[66] Ammianus, *Res gestae*, 25.6.10: "Hos autem Saracenos ideo patiebamur infestos, quod salaria muneraque plurima a Iuliano ad similitudinem praeteriti temporis accipere vetiti, questique apud eum, solum audierant, imperatorem bellicosum et vigilantem ferrum habere, non aurum."

[67] *Novellae Theodosianae,* 24.2 (dated September 12, 443.): "Quibus cum principe castrorumque praepositis pro laborum vicissitudine limitanei tantum militis duodecimam annonarum partem, distribuendam videlicet inter eos magisteriae potestatis arbitrio, deputamus. De Saracenorum vero foederatorum aliarumque gentium annonariis alimentis nullam penitus eos decerpendi aliquid vel auferendi licentiam habere concedimus. Sciant plane, quod, si quid amplius, quam eis ex nostra auctoritate statutum est, audeant usurpare, utpote sacrae pecuniae violatores, et ipsi, facultatibus suis tui culminis dispositione limitibus adsignandis, poenam gladii sustinebunt et qui tanti flagitii vel potius proditionis publicae ministros participesve se dederint, pari supplicio subiacebunt nullum effugium nec sacra adnotatione nec lege pragmatica, divinisve mandatis, nullam spem salutis habituri. »

[68] *Notitia dignitatum*, Or. XXVIII Limes Aegypti, comes rei militaris: *Equites Saraceni Thamudeni, Scenas Veteranorum, Ala tertia Arabum, Thenemuthi, Cohors secunda Ituraeorum, Aiy;* Or. XXXI, Thebaid: *Ala octava Palmyrenorum, Equites sagitarii indigenae* (5 units), *Equites promoti indigenae* (1 unit), *Ala tertia dromedariorum Maximianopoli, Ala secunda dromedariorum Psinaula, Ala prima dromedariorum Precteos;* Or. XXXII Phoenicia: *Equites Saraceni indigenae Betroclus, Equites Saraceni Thelsee, Equites promoti indigenae* (3 units), *Equites sagittarii indigenae* (4 units); Or. XXXIII Syria: *Equites sagittarii indigenae* (4 units), *Equites promoti indigenae* (1 unit); Or. XXXIII Euphratensis: *Equites promoti indigenae Rusafa*; Or. XXXIV Palestine: *Equites Thamudeni Illyriciani Birsama, Equites promoti indigenae* (2 units), *Equites*

The shift away from traditional static military defenses from the fifth century is explained by another shift in the nomadic confederacies during this era. Into the fifth and sixth centuries, the influence of the Tanukh/Lakhmid confederacies had declined in favor of the Ghassanids. The geographic base of this confederacy was based in Arabia, not further north near Persia as the Lakhmids had been, indicating the projection of nomadic power from the south over the settled frontier, rather than from the north as before. An inscription from Umm el-Jimal attests the presence or at least influence of the Ghassanid confederacy of the southern Arabian Peninsula by this time. The so-called "Double Church" inscription records a Christian prayer written in Arabic for an Uliah, secretary of the chief of the Banu Amr, a member of the Ghassanid confederacy.[69]

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sagittarii indigenae (5 units), *Ala Antana dromedariorum*; Or. XXXV Osroene: *Equites promoti indigenae* (3 units), *Equites sagittarii indigenae* (3 units); Or. XXXVI Mesopotamia: *Cohors quinquagenaria Arabum Bethallaha, Equites promoti indigenae* (1 unit), *Equites sagittarii indigenae* (3 units); Or. XXXVII Arabia: *Cohors tertia felix Arabum in ripa Vade Afaris fluvii in castris Arnonensibus, Equites promoti indigenae* (2 units), *Equites sagittarii indigenae* (2 units).

[69] E.A. Knauf, "Umm el-Jimal: An Arab Town in Late Antiquity," *RBible* 91, 583; W. Kaegi, *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests* (New York, 1992), 26-65.
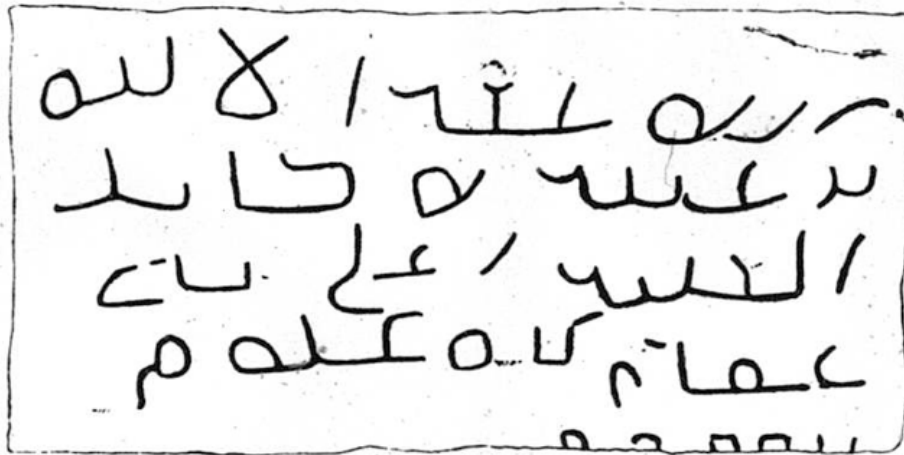
Inscr. 1.   Scale 1 : 6²/₃

الله غفرا لأنيه	1	*God, [grant] pardon to ʿUlaih,*
بن عبيدة كاتب	2	*the son of ʿUbaidah, the secretary*
العبيد اعلى بني	3	*of al-ʿUbaid, the chief of the Banū*
عمرى تنبد علا(ىى)ه من	4	*ʿAmr! May have notice of it he who*
[يقرؤه]	5	*reads it!*

Figure 39: The "Double Church" Inscription

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This inscription itself is insufficient evidence that Umm el-Jimal was a Ghassanid controlled town per se. Further, it is unclear whether any of the nomads in fact attempted to or were able to control parts of the settled zone at all. However, the inscription, along with other inscriptional evidence presented here, is enough to say that the Ghassanids and other specific nomadic peoples/leaders/confederacies moved in the larger space of a desert zone bounded by the cultivated zone, and so had contacts and relations with the zone as the meeting point between cultures/economies. In other words, nomads came and went freely across the frontiers, and in the process maintained important contacts with the settled zone as the part of a larger cultural and economic space.[70]

Combined with the aforementioned Safaitic and Jadhima inscriptions, the evidence for Umm el-Jimal paints the picture of a late Roman town whose center of gravity was inclusive with that of the the open desert and its nomadic inhabitants, both existing in their own right relative to Rome and Persia, not as subsidiaries of the imperial presence. This was no doubt largely because they lay at the very fringes of Roman/Persian power, therefore assuming an independent character and direct sway in the desert zone. As Bert de Vries states, Umm el-Jimal was subject to a paradox in its relations with the imperial: ". . . our focus of attention, the people and culture of Umm al-Jimal should not be obscured by interpreting it predominantly in terms of Roman imperial presence and phenomena. The operative question is Umm al-Jimal's cultural history, not the influence of Rome. Yet that influence is there and should be frankly recognized."[71]

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[70] See further discussion of the geography and economy in chapter 2.

[71] De Vries (2007), 468.

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Another case in point is the nomadic leader Aspebetos, who led his people across the Roman *limes* from Persia in 420. He had served as an important Persian ally guarding the frontiers with Rome. However, he had become persona non-grata there when he had helped to protect groups of Christians fleeing persecutions ordered by the Persian king Yazdagird I. He helped them escape into Roman territory instead. Upon reaching Roman lands himself, he was met by the Master of Soldiers of the east, Anatolius, who appointed him a Roman phylarch. Eventually he converted to Christianity himself and became an influential bishop of the nomads, officially called the "bishop of the encampments," and even served as a delegate to the Council of Ephesus in 431.[72] Yet another example is the fifth century nomad ruler Amorcesos, who migrated from Persia into Roman territory, where he carried out raids against Persian subjects on the frontiers. He eventually seized the island of Iotabe near the gulf of Aqaba and was formally recognized as a Roman phylarch. Like Aspebetos and the earlier Imru' ul-Qays (under Constantine), Amorcesos also converted to Christianity.[73] Thus showing not only a shift of political allegiances, but also of religious.

Sometime by the late fifth century and into the sixth, the Ghassanid confederacy of central Arabia had become the most powerful nomadic ally of the Romans. Justinian relied on phylarchs of this coalition to control both the frontiers with Persia and even the internal affairs of provinces. Such was the case with his phylarch of Palestine, Abokharabos. who like many other

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[72] The story is found in Cyril of Scythopolis, *Life of Saint Euthymius*, J.B. Cotelier, ed., *Ecclesial. Graecae Monumenta*, vol. 2, *Vitae SS Euthymie, Sabae*, in Festugiere, *Les moines d'Orient* (Paris, 1961-3), 3.1-3. Aspebet's grandson, Terebon II told the story to Cyril. In 421, Theodosius II successfully led his armies against the Persian Bahram V, In the peace treaty which followed, both sides agreed to allow freedom of worship for Christians and Mazdaeans within their respective territories. See J.S. Trimingham, *Christianity Among the Arabs in Pre-Islamic Times* (London, 1979), 109.

[73] Isaac (1990), 247. See also M. Sartre, *IGLS* 13.1.9046 with commentary, 116.

frontier phylarchs extended his authority over the whole broad transitional zone, within and without Roman territory. In 529/30 this phylarch even helped to suppress the Samaritan revolt, taking twenty thousand rebels captive within Roman territory and then turning around and selling them in Persian and "Indian" territory.[74] Further evidence from Justinian's reign indicates a formalization of relations with nomad phylarchs. A law of Justinian denoting the authority of a moderator over the province of Arabia lists the Roman phylarch next to the office of the *dux* and other offices.[75] In the *strata* dispute of 540, a Persian ally, Mundhir had violated a treaty with Rome by raiding across the limes in conflict with the Roman Ghassanid phylarch Arethas south of Palmyra. Mundhir defended his action to his Persian king Khusro by claiming that his raids were not in violation of the Roman treaty because the wording of the treaty did not mention Saracens specifically.[76] Consequently, a later treaty of 562 did specifically mention Saracens.[77]

Mundhir and Arethas also appear in an earlier controversy of 528 when Arethas came into conflict with the *dux* of Palestine and took refuge across the *limes* within Persian territory,

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[74] Malalas, *Chronographia*, 445ff.

[75] *Novellae Iusinianae,* 102: "Respiciamus itaque et Araborum provinciam, causam requirentes propter quam et fiscalia minus idonea sunt, cum utique provincia sit uberrima, et turba nos adeuntium circumstat et ingemiscunt omnes, alii quidem furta alii vero iniquitates alii aliorum denuntiantes damnorum occasionem, et causam malignitatis invenimus ex infirmitate facta circa administrationem. Erat enim sic vilis qui civilem habebat administrationem, ut deserviret armorum duci et in illius iaceret voluntatibus salus eius, nisi famularetur administratio. Itaque et tempus iam continuum est ex quo etiam defecit, et ea quae civilis sunt cinguli et militaris agit, neque sibi neque illi omnino sufficiens; occupatus namque est non ut aliquid subiectis prosit, sed ut ex utraque lucretur."

[76] Procopius, *Bellum Persicum,* 2.1: "Χρόνῳ δὲ οὐ πολλῷ ὕστερον ὁ Χοσρόης μαθὼν ὡς καὶ Ἰταλίαν Βελισάριος Ἰουστινιανῷ βασιλεῖ προσποιεῖν ἤρξατο, οὐκέτι κατέχειν οἷός τε ἦν τὴν διάνοιαν, ἀλλὰ σκήψεις ἐπινοεῖν ἤθελεν ὅπως δὴ λόγῳ τινὶ εὐπρεπεῖ τὰς σπονδὰς λύσειεν. [2] ὑπὲρ ὧν κοινολογησάμενος Ἀλαμουνδάρῳ ἐκέλευεν αὐτὸν ξυμπορίζεσθαι πολέμου αἰτίας. [3] ὁ δὲ Ἀρέθα ἐπικαλέσας ὅτι αὐτὸν περὶ γῆς ὁρίων βιάζοιτο, ἐς χεῖράς τε αὐτῷ ἐν σπονδαῖς ἦλθε καὶ γῆν τὴν Ῥωμαίων ἐπὶ ταύτῃ τῇ σκήψει καταθεῖν ἤρξατο."

[77] *Menander: The Principal Fragments,* 4.280ff. See *Menander: The Principal Fragments*, trans. F.G. Allinson (London, 1921).

where the Persian phylarch Mundhir engaged and killed him. Justinian then dispatched the *duces* of Phoenice, Arabia and Mesopotamia, in coordination with other Roman phylarchs, to hunt Mundhir down. However, Mundhir fled into the inner desert beyond the reach of the Roman forces, though his base camp was destroyed along with four Persian frontier forts.[78] Also enlisted in the struggle against Mundhir were the Hujrid dynasty connected with the Himyarite people of the southern Arabia peninsula.[79] This people are possibly connected with the Kinda confederacy mentioned in fifth century inscriptions from south Arabia.[80] Althought there seems to be a connection with south Arabia, there seems to be an even stronger association between the Hujrids and the central Arabian territory of Ma'add.[81] Apparently, the Roman emperor Anastasius became interested in allying with the Hujrid's of Ma'add in 502/3.[82] Indeed, Hujr's grandson Al-Harith was killed in action against Mundhir in 527.[83] Shortly thereafter (530/1) the Romans sent an embassy to a "leader of Kinda and Ma'add, descendant of Al-Harith.[84] This alliance is confirmed by Procopius.[85]

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[78] Malalas, *Chronographia*, 434ff; Theophanes, *Chronographia*, AM 6024, 178.

[79] Fischer (2008), 256.

[80] J. Ryckmans, "Inscriptions sud-Arabes (dixième série)," *Le Muséon* 66 (1953), 267-317. c. 509-510.

[81] Fischer (2008), 25; C. Robin, "Les Arabes de Himyar, des 'Romains' et des Perses (IIIᵉ-VIIᵉ siècles de l'ère chrétienne)," *SEC* 1 (2008), 167-208.

[82] Theophanes, *Chronographia,* 144.

[83] Malalas, *Chronographia,* 434-5.

[84] Photius, *Bibliotheca*, 3. See Photius, *Bibliothèque*, R. Henry, ed. (Paris, 1967).

[85] Procopius, *Bellum Perssicum*, 1.20.9-10: "τὰς γὰρ Ἀρκαδίου ἐντολὰς ἐν ἀλογίᾳ οὐδεμιᾷ ποιησάμενος εἰρήνῃ τε ἀφθόνῳ χρώμενος διαγέγονεν ἐς Ῥωμαίους τὸν πάντα χρόνον καὶ Θεοδοσίῳ τὴν ἀρχὴν διεσώσατο. αὐτίκα γοῦν πρὸς Ῥωμαίων τὴν βουλὴν γράμματα ἔγραψεν, ἐπίτροπός τε οὐκ ἀπαρνούμενος Θεοδοσίου βασιλέως εἶναι καὶ πόλεμον ἐπανατεινόμενος, ἤν τις αὐτῷ ἐς ἐπιβουλὴν ἐγχειροίη καθίστασθαι."

Conclusion: The Importance of Arab Confederacies on the Frontiers

The extension of Rome's frontiers up to the edge of the desert itself in the second century effectively eliminated the settled client states which had previously acted as independent buffers between itself and Persian territory. These buffer states, such as the Nabataeans and Palmyra, had themselves formerly conducted relations with the nomadic peoples of the desert in an attempt to coopt or at least gain some control over the great potential threat these mobile raiders posed to the sedentary population. When Rome absorbed its frontier clients, it in turn took on the direct responsibility for frontier defenses, and thus the need to treat with the nomadic powers directly. Rome did so as it did with other barbarian powers on the frontiers throughout the empire, by coopting them into its defensive structure.

The extremely mobile and flexible nature of the bedouin and the formidable region which they inhabited made the nomads even more unpredictable and difficult to control than frontier barbarians elsewhere. Just as the states which preceded the Romans, and the Persians had long known, the nomads could never be controlled completely, because the desert was their home and only they had the knowledge and means to operate in it effectively. Thus, the Romans adopted the policy which the others had long practiced, to ally themselves with the nomads as a defensive and police buffer along the settled rim of the desert. The bedouin had seemingly always been a factor to be reckoned with on the frontiers, but prior to the second century, they appear in the sources more as a subsidiary annoyance than as a major factor. However, the potential power and hence significance of the nomads seems to have become greater from the late second century on. The number of references to them increases, and the nomads appear to take on a much more significant role in the defensive context. This change corresponds with a change in the character of the nomad element itself. First, there was a large displacement of nomadic peoples in the

region of northwest Arabia and the Persian frontiers on the Euphrates. This was due to several factors, among which were climatic difficulties and conflict over scarce resources, as well as a shake-up of the frontiers due to the new and ambitious political and religious program of the Sassanid revival in Persia during the third century. This displacement resulted in many small, independent peoples coalescing into larger confederacies, which eventually came to be ruled by strong centralized monarchs, such as the Tanukh under the Azd and later Lakhmid dynasties in the third through fifth centuries and the Ghassanids in the fifth and sixth centuries.

The larger confederacies essentially operated like nomadic states, with formidable military resources, but no fixed boundaries or limits to authority within the desert regions. The potential impact of the nomads thus increased many fold, and so they took on a more crucial role in the dynamics of the struggle between Persian and Rome. This role is reflected in the greater attention paid to the nomad element in the sources. Clearly from the fourth century on, nomads play an even more crucial role along the eastern frontiers, as enemies and allies of the Romans. Like their counterparts on the northern frontiers of the empire, these native units become integrated fully into the overall tactical and strategic scheme of defense, both by virtue of their role as appointed phylarchs and the monetary and material support they receive for their services rendered to the state. However, just like the barbarian allies in other parts of the frontiers, they could also be a very unpredictable factor, capable of switching both geographic and political affiliation according to their mobile natures. They could thus either be crucial allies or great liabilities depending on the circumstance at hand. Far from being exploited by either side, they seem more often to have been themselves the exploiters of their position in the transitional desert zones between Rome and Persia. In the end it was they who controlled the desert and not the great empires on either side.

CHAPTER FOUR:
FRONTIER OF FAITH:
CHRISTIANITY, CULTURE AND IDENTITY IN LATE ANTIQUE ARABIA

The top down model of religion presupposes the spread of faith and practice from the center outwards to the periphery, and as this process takes place, the local becomes associated with the center through the faith bond, perhaps eliminating distinctions between the center and the periphery under the tutelage and protection of the former. Hence security of faith begins at the center. From the imperial perspective, Christianity was Roman by late antiquity, and so the center was Rome. Roman religious patriarchy increasingly pressured the local to conform to the imperial views and church councils became the mechanism by which Christianity was regulated and made orthodox across the imperial span. The net effect was a suppression of the local character of faith, pagan, Christian, and other in favor of the center. In keeping with the theme of this study, the task is to turn this paradigm upside down, making local faith the center and the imperial into the other.

As with other areas of study, the first problem is that the main sources for Christianity come from the top down and somewhat in isolation, focusing on theological debate, the minutes of councils, temple/church construction, persecutions, bodies of canonical scripture and commentaries, etc.[1] To recapture the voice of the local requires a model which views religion as an organic development. Archaeological evidence can lend itself to such an approach. However, the identification and collection of cult centers, altars, statues, paraphernalia and artistic elements requires a mode of interpretation in order for these material sources to begin to speak. Bert de

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[1] D. Sourdel, *Les cultes du Hauran à l'époque romaine* (*Inst., franç. d'Archéol. de Beyrouth, Biblioth. arch, et hist.*, t. LIII) (Paris, 1952).

Vries's recent work on traces of pagan religion at Umm el-Jimal provides such an interpretive framework.[2] De Vries's model posits religion as a "social mechanism to achieve security." The substance of this mechanism begins with archaeological "traces" which testify to faith and religiosity, such as symbols, inscriptions, and the socio-political framework in which these exist. The 'traces' become threads of memory which survive over time, becoming an element of continuity and hence mechanism of security for the local society.[3]

The political landscape of Umm el-Jimal is a product of interleaving elements: local Arab culture, the Nabataean phase of occupation (AD 50-106), and the Roman phase of occupation (AD 106-411). Local culture is dominant in this model, and so acts as a control against which the Nabataean and Roman phases are measured. Traces of local culture exist mainly in linguistic terms and names recorded in inscriptions at the site, which indicate a mixed sedentary and nomadic culture in the pre-occupation period. When viewed against a similar body of evidence for the Syrian and Arabian frontier as a whole, Umm el-Jimal seems typical of the range of sites.[4]

The Nabataean phase of occupation began with domination of urban areas by a succession of Nabataean kings, followed by the exploitation and absorption of rural agricultural areas over time. During this period Bostra became the capital of the northern part, and Umm el-Jimal one of its dependents, as evidenced by the large body of inscriptions in Nabataean script

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[2] B. de Vries, "Between the Cults of Syria and Arabia: Traces of Pagan Religion at Umm al-Jimal," *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan X*: Amman: Department of Antiquities of Jordan (2011), 177-91.

[3] De Vries, "Between the Cults," 177. See A.T. Smith, *The Political Landscape: Constellations of Authority in Early Complex Polities* (Berkeley, 2003); V. Harle, *Ideas Of Social Order In The Ancient World* (Westport, 1998); P.L. Berger, *The Social Reality of Religion* (London, 1969), 26-28, 51; J. Assmann, *The Mind of Egypt* (New York, 2002), 6-11.

[4] De Vries (2011), 178.

and architectural fragments dating from the mid 1st-late 3rd centuries, including some belonging to members of the Bostra city council, as referenced above.[5] The Roman phase of occupation adds yet another layer over the still existing local and Nabataean layers. In 106, the emperor Trajan formally annexed the southern portion of the Nabataean kingdom, absorbing the old client state in favor of direct control. Here the evidence is characterized by the introduction of Latin inscriptions, some mentioning the name of the new entity, *Provincia Arabia,* and a succession of new military/administrative structures detailed in the archaeological history above. Religious elements of this period are colored by the process of Hellenization or Romanization, but only on the surface. Underneath, the elements of the the core Arab identity are still at work. This corresponds with the view that popular religion remained relatively untouched underneath the Greco-Roman veneer.[6] In combination with the archaeological traces of pagan religion at Umm el-Jimal, the above framework makes it possible to understand the consequences of these interleaving elements. Three different pagan gods are named on altars from the late antique period at Umm el- Jimal: Dushara Aarra, Solmos and Holy Zeus Epekoos.

The first of these is attested in a bilingual Greek/Nabataean inscription on an altar in the ruins of a house. [7]

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[5] De Vries (2011), 178.

[6] J. Teixidor, *The Pagan God: Popular Religion in the Greco-Roman Near East* (Princeton, NJ, 1977)
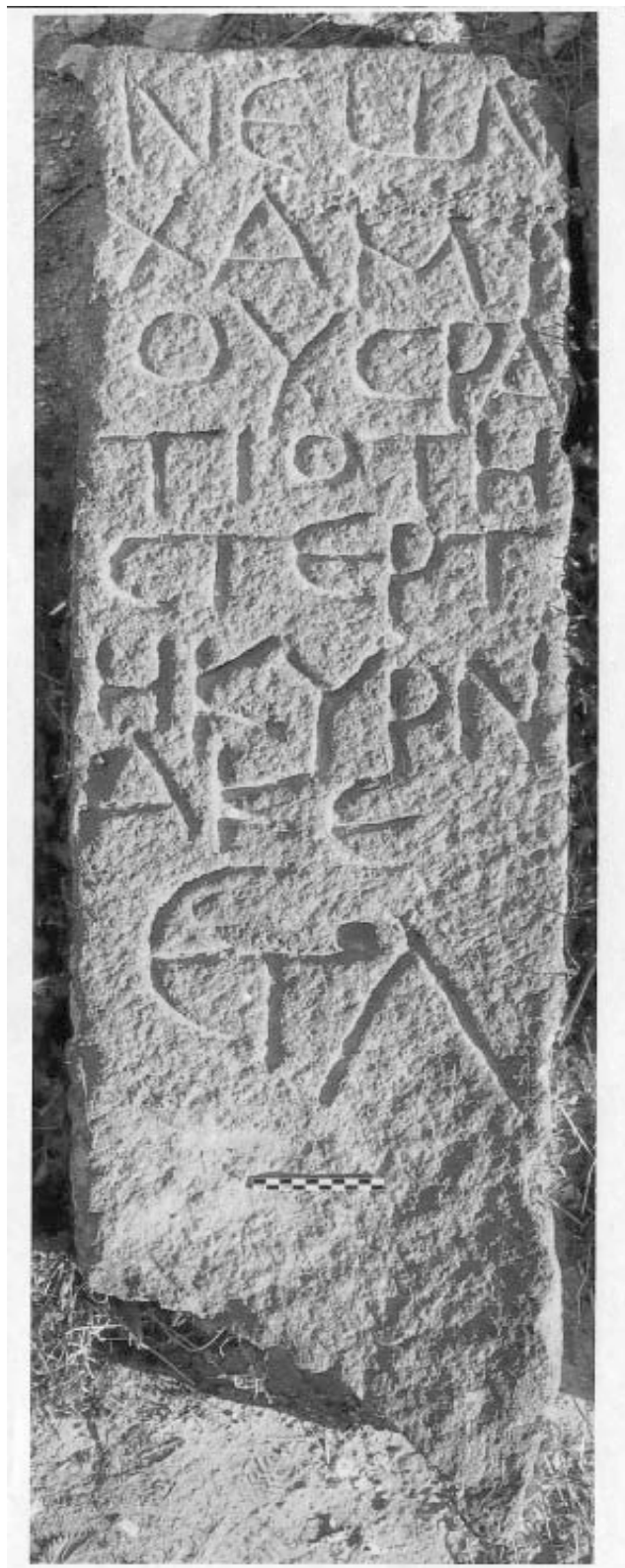
[7] De Vries (2011), 179.

Figure 40: *Masexos* Inscription

The inscription reads:

Masexos Aoueidanou Dousarei Aarra (Greek)[8]

msgd' dy mskw br 'wyd' l-dwsr (Nabataean)

The cult-stone which was made by Masik, son of 'Awidha, for Dushara.[9]

The inscription is dated late first to early 2nd century from the style of the Nabataean script. A Masik is also attested on an altar dedicated to Dushara Aara in Bostra with the date 147.[10] Masexos is an interpretation of the Arab-Aramaic name *msk*, indigenous to the culture of the area, attested both among the settlements of the Hauran and the desert regions of the Safaitic nomads in the Harra. [11]

Dushara Aara was a god worshiped at the major cult center in Bostra, but here found in the satellite town of Umm el-Jimal. The cult is heavily attested throughout the Nabataean zone and was also subsumed into the Greco-Roman cult of Dionysos.[12] Moreover, Littmann identifies the Greek *Aara* as a transliteration of the Arabic root word *ghry,* and so representing the god *al-Gharriyyu* at Petra.[13] This god becomes *A'ra* and linked with *Dushara* as the patron deity of Bostra from at least the reign of the Nabataean king Rabell II (r. 70-106) and attested into the era of Commodus. Hence, here is a clear example of cultural mixing across the desert and settled as well as the local and Greco-Roman spheres.

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[8] Littmann (1913a), 37-38, No. 238 ; Sourdel (1952), 60.

[9] Littmann (1914), no. 38, 34-35.

[10] Littmann (1914), 34.

[11] M. Sartre, *Bostra: Des origines d'Islam* (Paris, 1985), 216.

[12] De Vries (2011), 181.

[13] Littmann (1914), 35; Sourdel (1952), 60.

The second god, Solmos, is found in a dedicatory inscription on an altar stone. The inscription reads:

Theo Solmo Sareidos Aoueidou eu[seb]on anetheken

Sareidos, (son of) Aweidos, dedicated (it) in reverence to the god Solmos.[14] Attestations of this deity are rare and indications are that the god was venerated in local Arab society of the region.[15]

Figure 41: *Sareidos* Inscription

The third god, Holy Zeus Epekoos, or "Holy Zeus Who Listens" is attested on a small altar located in the courtyard of a house. It reads:

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[14] Littmann (1913a), no. 239, 139-132.

[15] De Vries (2011), 182-83.

Dii agio epekoo K...

"To Holy Zeus Who Listens (by) K [...] ..."

As one would expect, inscriptions to Zeus are very common throughout the region. However, Zeus was also used as a common pseudonym for a local deity, and so here may refer to a regional god.

Taken together the three gods discussed above represent different examples of local religion at Umm el-Jimal, corresponding to the framework of three interleaving political/cultural periods. Solmos represents the indigenous local Arab culture; Dushara Aara represents the Nabataeanization of the local, connecting an urban cult deity to the the town; and Holy Zeus Epekoos may represent the Greco-Romanization of a regional Phoenician or Syrian deity.[16] This evidence, along with the 4th century example of the pagan 'Nabataean' temple, discussed above in the archaeological section, leads to the conclusion that paganism remained strong until well into the 4th century, despite the spread of Christianity into the region as early as 3rd century.[17] Because Umm el-Jimal lacks the imposing veneer of the official Olympian religious context found in large urban centers, such as Bostra, it can act as a clearer case study for the survival of local religion over time. Such a use of the evidence lends insight into the dynamics of religion in the social sphere, and the construction of a local mechanism of "security" in the face of domination by external powers and their religious imports. Further, as detailed in the chapter of this study on Arab church councils, Christianity itself exemplified a unique and independent character in the region of Arabia throughout late antiquity, one which often brought it into direct conflict with the powers that were.

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[16] De Vries (2011), 189.

[17] De Vries (1989), 160.

As Bert de Vries states, Umm el-Jimal was subject to a paradox in its relations with the imperial: ". . . our focus of attention, the people and culture of Umm al-Jimal should not be obscured by interpreting it predominantly in terms of Roman imperial presence and phenomena. The operative question is Umm al-Jimal's cultural history, not the influence of Rome. Yet that influence is there and should be frankly recognized."[18] The archaeological history of Umm el-Jimal speaks to this view. The arrival of Roman occupation on the heels of the Nabataeans in the 2nd century subsumed the town under the mantle of a military/administrative center. However, as this mantle slowly lifted and then disappeared into the 6th century, the local was there to boom and prosper in its own right, reaching its highest peak at the moment of Roman decline. The case of the nomadic element at Umm el-Jimal defines a symbiotic relationship between the town and the desert which precedes and outlasts the periods of Nabataean and Roman occupations, all the while maintaining its own gravity even at the height of military and administrative control.

Finally, a close study of religion as a local phenomenon at Umm el- Jimal shows the continuity of local religiosity in the face of the influx and superficial domination of the imperial faiths. Such an independence and ability to adapt and flourish extends into the Christian and Islamic eras at the site. Indeed, Umm el-Jimal provides a micro-study of many of the larger issues of the late antique frontier in Arabia discussed in this dissertation: the role of geography in shaping identity in the late antique near east, the nature of the imperial defensive infrastructure, the role of nomads in the desert zone, and the negotiation of religious identity in church councils of the pre-Islamic era.

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[18] De Vries (2007), 468.

The Growth of Christianity on the Frontiers

By the third century, Christianity was well established along the eastern frontiers of the Roman Empire. By 244, when Origen, bishop of Caesaria, was called to the province of Arabia to help settle a Christological dispute over the views of bishop Beryllus, there were enough bishops resident to have what amounted to a synod on the matter.[19] By the fourth century, Eusebius, bishop of Caesaria c. 314-339, could remark that there were churches in Petra and among the Saracens in the desert.[20] Christianity was also expanding on the Persian frontier during this era. The sixth century Syriac *Chronicle of Arbela* mentions the beginning of a bishopric at Adiabene as early as 100.[21] By the time the Sassanids took power in the third century, the *Chronicle* lists twenty bishops spread geographically along the frontier east of the Euphrates.[22] By the mid third century, the *Diatessaron* of Tatian had appeared in Syriac translation from the original Greek, suggesting some degree of popular demand for the work

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[19] Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica,* 6.33: "Βήρυλλος ὁ μικρῷ πρόσθεν δεδηλωμένος Βόστρων τῆς Ἀραβίας ἐπίσκοπος, τὸν ἐκκλησιαστικὸν παρεκτρέπων κανόνα, ξένα τινὰ τῆς πίστεως παρεισφέρειν ἐπειρᾶτο, τὸν σωτῆρα καὶ κύριον ἡμῶν λέγειν τολμῶν μὴ προϋφεστάναι κατ᾽ ἰδίαν οὐσίας περιγραφὴν πρὸ τῆς εἰς ἀνθρώπους ἐπιδημίας μηδὲ μὴν θεότητα ἰδίαν ἔχειν, ἀλλ᾽ ἐμπολιτευο- μένην αὐτῷ μόνην τὴν πατρικήν. **(2.)** ἐπὶ τούτῳ πλείστων ἐπισκόπων ζητήσεις καὶ διαλόγους πρὸς τὸν ἄνδρα πεποιημένων, μεθ᾽ ἑτέρων παρακληθεὶς Ὠριγένης κάτεισι μὲν εἰς ὁμιλίαν τὰ πρῶτα τῷ ἀνδρί, τίνα νοῦν ἔχοι, ἀποπειρώμενος, ὡς δ᾽ ἔγνω ὅ τι καὶ λέγοι, εὐθύνας μὴ ὀρθοδοξοῦντα *(5)* λογισμῷ τε πείσας, τῇ περὶ τοῦ δόγματος ἐφίστησιν ἀληθείᾳ ἐπί τε τὴν προτέραν ὑγιῆ δόξαν ἀποκαθίστησιν." See Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica*, trans. K. Lake, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, MA, 1926). See also A. Harnack, *The Mission and Expansion of Christianity in the First Three Centuries* (New York, 1908), 2.153ff.

[20] Eusebius, *Comm. on Isaiah*, 2.23. (on Isaiah 42.11): "τούτων δὲ τῶν λόγων τὴν ἀλήθειαν ἡ διὰ τῶν πραγμάτων ἔκβασις ἐπιστώσατο ἐκκλησιῶν Χριστοῦ καὶ ἐπ᾽ αὐτῆς τῆς Πετραίων πόλεως, κατά τε τὴν χώραν αὐτῆς καὶ ἐν ταῖς ἐρήμοις τῶν Σαρακηνῶν καθ᾽ ἡμᾶς αὐτοὺς ἱδρυμένων. καὶ ἄλλως δὲ Κ η δ ὰ ρ ἑρμηνεύεται σκοτασμὸς διὰ τοὺς μεταβαλόντας ἀπὸ τοῦ σκοτασμοῦ ἐπὶ τὸ κατηγγελμένον 'φῶς *(45)* τοῖς ἔθνεσιν'." See Eusebius, *Commentary on Isaiah*, trans. J. Armstrong, J. Elowsky, ed. (Downer's Grove, IL, 2013).

[21] Frye (1983), 2.925. Dated much later than the events it describes, this work might be seen better as a secondary source and its pro-Christian bias on the Persian side can be compared to that of the Latin and Greek fathers such as Eusebius and others.
[22] Frye (1983), 2.925.

among a Semitic Christian population in Persia.[23] Further, the sixth century *Chronicle of Edessa*

mentions the destruction of part of the Christian church in Edessa in 201.[24] At any rate, by the

arrival of Manichean Christianity in the mid 250's, the numbers of Christians had grown large

enough to become the target of persecution under the new and zealously Zoroastrian Sassanid

dynasty.[25] This new factor would impact the alignment of Persian Christians with the Roman

Empire such that the ruling Lakhmid party of 'Amr, who protected a significant Christian

population from his base at al-Hira on the Persian frontier, shifted allegiance to Rome and led his

son Imru'ul-Qays to be appointed a *foederatus* by Constantine.[26]

Bishops, Emperors and Councils

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[23] Frye (1983), 2.927. This work was a gospel concordance and its author had apparently travelled from Adiabene to Rome where he was converted by Justin Martyr around 170 after which he composed the book. Syriac was the language of the semitic non-Persian population and the chief language of Christianity along the frontier east of the Roman Empire.

[24] Frye (1983), 2.928. Similar caveats apply to the *Chronicle of Edessa* as the *Chronicle of Arbela* cited above.

[25] Frye (1983), 2.929.

[26] First, there is the account of Hisham al-Kalbi, which states that Imru' ul-Qays was the first of the Lakhmid kings to convert to Christianity. See Tabari, *Tarikh,* vol. 1, 53. Then there is the fact that, although there is no indication in the text of the inscription that he was Christian, crosses appear to be engraved on the capital of a column belonging to the tomb. See H. Gaube, *Ein Arabischer Palast in Sudsyrien: Hirbet El-Baida* (Beirut, 1974), Tafel I, 3. Also, Manichean papyri in Coptic indicate indicate that 'Amr, Imru' ul-Qays's father had protected Manichean Christianity during his reign. See Coptic Manichean papyri, as in H.H. Schneider's view of C. Schmidt and H.J. Potosky, "Ein Mani-Fund aus Agypten", *Gnomon* 9 (1933), 344-45. These Papyri also confirm 'Amr's rule in Hira. The fact of Imru' ul-Qays Christianity has not been without opposition however. Noldecke, one of the first to critically study Imru' ul-Qays, did not accept Hisham al'Kalbi's statement that Imru' ul-Qays had adopted Christianity. However, his study was completed before the discovery of the Namara inscription discussed above in the chapter on nomads. See T. Noldeke, *Die Geschicte der Perser und Araber zur Zeit der Sassaniden* (Leiden, 1879). Imru'ul-Qays's Christianity would have been a very strong reason to relocate from the persecuting regime of Shapur II, to the service of a Christian embracing Constantine. In Persia, Christians had grown so numerous by the late-third century that they began to form into bishoprics. See Frye (1983), 930ff. There are also other precedents for eastern rulers converting to Christianity during this period, the most direct parallel of which was King Tiridates of Armenia, also *foederatus* under Constantine, as Imru' ul-Qays (not to mention Constantine himself). See I. Shahid (1984), 33. For further discussion see chapter 3.

The nature and role of bishops was key in the development of the early Christian church and to an understanding of local versus state religious identity and dynamics. In the beginning, there was no overall administrative structure for Christian groups. Rather, each community was directed by its own bishop who was appointed by his peers, normally from the same region where he was to rule. This appointment seemed to have been subject to at least the tacit counsel and approval of the local population.[27] Upon appointment for a life term, the local power of a bishop was for the most part autocratic, and included the ordination lower clergy, admission/excommunication of laity, and management of church revenues.[28] If there were a major dispute between a bishop and his flock, or other bishops of the area, this would be adjudicated in ad hoc local councils, which eventually became regular annual or biannual meetings.

In turn, beginning in 325 at Nicea, disputes which outgrew the local councils in scope were called to ecumenical councils which were held as required, a number of which are discussed in detail below. These ecumenical councils were meant to reach a level of consensus among the church communities on matters of universal importance, such as the nature of Christ himself (Christology), etc. They also represented a chance for the Roman emperor himself to exercise some influence over the church itself once it became privileged under Constantine in the early 300's and, by 380, the official imperial religion under Theodosius I.[29] Hence the councils, both local and ecumenical, had a certain political importance in addition to the theological. As intended, the ecumenical councils had the effect of defining an official "orthodoxy" of religious

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[27] Jones (1964), 915ff.

[28] Jones (1964), 875.

[29] Jones (1964), 86ff, 166ff.

thought and practice as time passed. Such an orthodoxy was particularly advantageous for emperors who were chiefly concerned with checking or eliminating pockets of local and regional power in favor of a unified empire.

Two chief challenges to universal rule were the army and the church: powerful military commanders and their legions on the one hand, and powerful bishops and their religious parties on the other. This was especially the case with the so-called patriarchal bishops of large cities or metropolitan areas who traditionally held an even higher rank and influence than other bishops, even if the local bishops of smaller communities did not always acknowledge their authority as such.[30] The fact that patriarchal bishops, such as those of Constantinople, Antioch, Jerusalem, Alexandria in the east and Rome in the west, influenced such large populations under their sole religious authority made them correspondingly powerful politically as well.

Thus, it was in the best interests of the Roman emperor to patronize these patriarchs. The emperor's self-appointed privilege of calling large ecumenical councils answered this cause, by formalizing the authority of the patriarchs and the dictates of the councils and implying imperial authority over the church as a whole. From the time of Constantine onward, emperors strengthened their use of councils backed by force to discipline and tighten religious orthodoxy, especially in the eastern empire, where the incidence of diverse local religious beliefs and practices was the greatest. This was nowhere more evident than in Palestine, Arabia, Egypt and North Africa, where major heresies attracted political attention and sometimes swelled to the level of civil unrest. It is the object of this study to show how the imperial versus local aspect of religious and political identity in Arabia played out in church councils of the centuries before

Islam, creating a rift which may have helped prepare the ground for the explosive rise of the new religion in the sixth century.

The Syncretism of Christianity and the Arabs' Place in It

From its earliest history, it was difficult for the "universal" or "orthodox" religion of Christianity to resist being shaped by the forces of its diverse cultural context. Like Judaism before and Islam after, Christians were "people of the book," meaning that the religion was text-based. This textual basis was itself diverse, lacking unity and in many places obscure and unclear. So, early Christians almost immediately began to attempt to collect, unify, analyze, debate, translate and order any and all texts they could associate with the tradition. The primary surviving texts of the first century church were the Gospels themselves, the Acts of the Apostles and the letters of the Apostles, written within a period of about 70-80 years after Christ's death.[31] These texts had been written independently of each other and so portrayed events with uncertain and incomplete chronology, varied details and uncertain meanings which were associated with the prevailing cultures which created them. This was prime ground for the growth of a strong secondary tradition of interpretation and clarification of the scriptures.

Along these lines, there were a number of early texts which reflected certain intellectual and theological trends of the time, such as Gnosticism, or attempted to fill in details about Jesus's life and events which were not included in the primary texts.[32] Examples of such

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[31] P. Canivet, "Christianity in the 1st Century," in H. Badr, ed., *Christianity: A History in the Middle East* (Beirut, 2005).

[32] Canivet (2005), 50.

apocryphal texts are *Proto-Evangelion* of James, which detailed the details of Christ's infancy and Mary's virgin birth, and the gospels of Thomas and Mary Magdalene on the gnostic side.[33] The next phase of the secondary tradition came later with the growth and mainstream acceptance of Christianity in the third to fourth centuries. This Greco-Roman tradition included sources such as the *Ecclesiastical History* of Eusebius, the exegetical writings of Origen, Augustine, and many others which would become known as the "Church Fathers" after their combined contributions to the growth and maturation of church structure and doctrine over time. These authors in turn had access to many earlier documents on church history which are now lost.[34]

This patristic tradition also saw increased efforts to define a scriptural canon which would unify the primary Jewish and Christian textual tradition. First of these was a new authoritative Greek translation of the Old Testament which came to be known as the *Septuagint*.[35] This was combined with the Greek New Testament books creating a unified "Bible" in the prevailing religious/cultural language of the Mediterranean world. This was followed by the Latin version of Jerome in the west, which came to be known as the Vulgate, still the basis of the modern Catholic Bible.[36] These were important steps in the process of creating a homogenous or "orthodox" Christian practice.

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[33] Canivet (2005), 50.

[34] For example, Eusebius drew upon Hegesippius (c. 115-185) whose work had attempted to trace the apostolicity of the early episcopals sees, and Justin (c. 100-185), a Palestinian who traveled to Rome where he founded a school in which the Syrian Tatian, author of the *Diatessaron* was a student, and influenced the break in tradition between Judaism and Christianity. Further, Ignatius of Antioch (martyred c. 110) studied the growth of early Christian communities and commented on the heirarchical order of the church from earliest times. See Canivet, (2005), 50.

[35] Commissioned by the king of Egypt Ptolemy II Philadelphus (r. 283-246 B.C.) to serve the Greek speaking Jewish population of Alexandria, who had settled there following their release from the Babylonian captivity. See Canivet, (2005), 51.

[36] Jerome (347-420). Translation completed by 405. See Bowersock, (1999), 524, 341.

Before this, biblical texts existed individually and thus had to be collected piecemeal to create a unified "Bible," and every "Bible" could be different from another.[37] This situation combined with the expense and difficulty of obtaining copies of the individual texts led to a diversity of theological beliefs and practices across the Christian sphere. Local interpretations added layers of diversity, and the fact that texts existed in many local languages only compounded this. Although Hellenistic rule from the time of Alexander the Great (d. 323) had imposed a Greek linguistic/cultural veneer across the Middle East by the Christian era, the original diversity of languages and cultures remained underneath the surface and were the lifeblood of local identity and expression.[38] Throughout Syria, Palestine and Mesopotamia, Aramaic was the common spoken language.[39] Nabataean and Syriac and Coptic gave voice to their own literary and theological traditions. Then take the diversity of pagan practices, philosophical beliefs and cultural dictates which predated and pervaded the Christian world and it is an understatement to say that Christian practice was anything but unified.

Christianity had begun to spread among Arab peoples during the first two centuries C.E., but the details of this growth are obscure. This obscurity is lifted with the adoption of Christianity by the King of Edessa, Abgar the Great in 200.[40] Indeed, this was the first state in the world to become Christian officially, at the very time when the religion was under attack within the Roman Empire. Edessa thus became the capital of the semitic Syriac Christian

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[37] Bowersock (1999), 341.

[38] Greek was the language of Hellenistic elites, officialdom, commerce and intellectual activity.

[39] Canivet (2005), 53.

[40] I. Shahid, "Arab Christianity Before the Rise of Islam," in H. Badr, ed., *Christianity: A History in the Middle East* (Beirut, 2005).

tradition.[41] The origins of Syriac Chistianity were Judeo-Christian. This is evidenced by the third century *Doctrine of Addai,* which states that the apostle Thomas was the one who had converted King Abgar.[42] Syriac scriptures also contain the influence of Jewish exegesis and the gospels themselves came to Syriac via translation of the reworked versions of Tatian's *Diatessaron.*[43] There is no sign that the gospels of Paul were known in Syriac at this time.

Syriac theology was filtered through a Semitic lens. Ascetism extended as far as avoiding the consumption of wine completely, even for the Eucharist.[44] The practice of *encratism*, the priority of baptizing virgins over those who were married, was common which then often made the institution of marriage controversial.[45] Further, the poetic genre, which was already an important Semitic form, came to have a strong role in theological exposition and debate in the Syriac tradition, including poetic dialogue.[46] In general, Syriac theology tended to avoid limitations on 'definitions' of faith since it was thought that faith was something without limits by nature.[47] Thus, a diversity of interpretations and practices was the rule in Arabia, leading to aspects of Greek theological practice being combined with indigenous Semitic Syriac traditions to create a unique brand of Christianity. Such a thought framework would distinguish local Arab

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[41] Shahid (2005), 435.

[42] P. Maraval, "Christianity in the Middle East in the 2nd and 3rd Centuries," in H. Badr, ed., *Christianity: A History in the Middle East* (Beirut, 2005), 75.

[43] The *Diatessaron* is a synthesis of all four gospels into one, dating from before 180 as mentioned above.

[44] Practiced among other sects such as the Marcionites and Manicheans as well.

[45] Endorsed by Tatian and later deemed heretical.

[46] S. Brock, "The Rise of Christian Thought: The Theological Schools of Antioch, Edessa and Nisibis," in H. Badr, ed., *Christianity: A History in the Middle East* (Beirut, 2005), 153-54.

[47] Brock (2005), 154.

Christianity from the increasingly "orthodox" imperial brand and be evident in church council proceedings.

By the end of the second century, the province of Oshroene was annexed by Rome (194-95).[48] Eusebius mentions the attendance of bishops from "Osrohene and the cities there" at a synod held in Palestine in 190.[49] The conversion and growth of Christianity at Edessa made it the base for further expansion eastward into Persia by the mid-second century.[50] By the mid-third century, the campaigns of Shapur I (r. 240-72) had forceably imported more Greek Christians into Persia. Later in the third century, Philip the Arab assumed the imperial throne in Rome in 244, during which he called a church council over charges of heresy in Arabia.[51] Though a native of the region, Philip seems to have made no lasting impact on the status of Christians one way or another, but his influence may have been felt under the surface of affairs via the church council held in his reign. More on this and Philip himself below.

From the fourth century, Arab Christianity became a house divided between the Christian communities of a fanatically Zoroastrian Sassanid Persia on one side and a newly Christianized Roman emperor Constantine on the other. The prevailing politics of either side would have a serious impact on Christian Arabs.[52] For Christianity, the geographic focus on the Persian side of

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[48] Maravel (2005), 76.

[49] The synod debated the date of the Easter (Paschal) celebration. Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 5.23.4: "ἔτι τε τῶν κατὰ τὴν Ὀσροηνὴν καὶ τὰς ἐκεῖσε πόλεις, καὶ ἰδίως Βακχύλλου τῆς Κορινθίων ἐκκλησίας ἐπισκόπου, καὶ πλείστων ὅσων ἄλλων, οἳ μίαν καὶ τὴν αὐτὴν δόξαν τε καὶ κρίσιν ἐξενηνεγμένοι, τὴν αὐτὴν τέθεινται ψῆφον. καὶ τούτων μὲν ἦν ὅρος εἷς, ὁ δεδηλωμένος·" The Syriac version gives "of the churches of Mesopotamia and the cities there." However, this part is absent in Rufinus's later Latin translation of 402/03. See S. Brock, "Eusebius and Syriac Christianity," in H.W. Attridge, G. Hata eds., *Eusebius, Christianity, and Judaism* (Detroit, 1992), 222.

[50] Maravel (2005), 76.

[51] See below.

[52] See chapter 3.

the desert frontier was the town of al-Hira on the west bank of the Euphrates. The town was ruled by the Lakhmid dynasty from the late third through early seventh centuries. As with Umm el-Jimal, its counterpart on the Roman side of the frontier, al-Hira was an economic and cultural crossroads between the fertile flood-plain of Mesopotamia on one side and the open desert of the nomads on the other. Its population accordingly was composed of settled peoples, semi-nomads, and nomads of Arab, Aramaean, and Iranian origin. Religiously, there was a mix of Nestorians, Manicheans, Monophysites, Gnostics, Jews, Zoroastrians and pagans alike.[53] Like Umm el-Jimal, el-Hira lay on important caravan routes between Babylon and central/western Arabia.[54]

Within this region, the Persian Empire officially distinguished between the area of the settled Aramaic population and that of the settled or semi-settled Arab population, calling it Beth Arabaye.[55] Eventually, under the Lakhmid dynasty the capital of the united confederacy of Arabs in this region made the frontier city of al-Hira their base from the late second century. These peoples were united under their common Christian faith and al-Hira took on the additional name of *al-Ibad*, short for *al-Ibad ar-Rabb*, "Slaves of the Lord," or *al-Ibad al Masih*, "Slaves of Christ." Later, in early Muslim literature this term specifically denotes "Christians of al-Hira and the district."[56] These peoples, collectively known in the Arab sources as the Tanukh, would later migrate out of Persian territory and into Rome under the pressure of Sasanian persecution of

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[53] I. Toral-Niehoff, "Late Antique Iran and the Arabs: The Case of al-Hira" *Journal of Persianate Studies* 6 (2013), 116.

[54] Toral-Niehoff (2013), 117.

[55] Trimingham (1979), 150.

[56] Trimingham (1979), 156.

Christians in early third century, just at the time when Rome itself was turning Christian under Constantine.[57]

The context of Arab Christianity is one of Judeo-Christian roots infused with a diversity of Hellenistic philosophic and religious influences, filtered through unique Semitic cultural and intellectual frameworks, as well as political change. When faced with increasingly insistent efforts at "orthodoxy" on the part of later Roman emperors from Constantine onward through Justininian, schisms would develop along these natural fault-lines. A study of the dynamics of Arab participation in church councils of late antiquity provides a lens with which to discern and detail this process.

Arab Church Councils

The growing pains of the Church are evident in its ecumenical and regional councils. The records of these councils can give us some insight into the development of the Christian Church in Arabia. However, as with many sources for the empire, when viewed from the official perspective, the councils tell us of the unanimous support of the orthodox state position on the part of the bishops, and by extension, laity of the province. So, these documents must, since the full body of signatories had to be unanimous in their support. On the other hand, to look through these sources to what was going on behind the scenes in Arabia, using the lens of religious, cultural and linguistic identity, is to see evidence of underlying tensions of dissent and resistance to the dictates of the councils. A dichotomy comes to light which mirrors the widening schism in the eastern Church through the fifth and sixth centuries.

The Beginnings: Bostra 246-47

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[57] See chapter 3.

The emperor Trajan (r. 98-117) created the province of Arabia Petraea in 106 and made

Bostra its capital, stationing a full legion in garrison there.[58] This province basically extended

the eastern line of the frontiers from the provinces Palestine I and II in the east and Phoenice

Libanensis to the north. (See map below.) This allowed the Romans to deal directly with the

native peoples of this transitional desert zone, instead of through client kings, such as the

Nabataeans. Trajan likely saw this addition as a stepping stone to further land acquisitions in

Mesopotamia and beyond. The province would also have an important effect on the acculturation

of its inhabitants, who had not been hellenized to a great extent under Alexander and his

successors. Roman occupation began the process of infusing Greco-Roman culture and

especially the Greek language into a region in which Semitic Arab culture was prevalent.[59] With

this Greco-Roman acculturation came the Christian religion.[60] Two church councils held in the

mid-third century show the progress of Christian provincialization by this time.

The first of these councils probably came during the reign of Gordian III (r. 238-244).[61]

It pursued charges of heresy against the see of Bostra, Beryllus. Beryllus maintained that Jesus

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[58] S.T. Parker (2006), 531.

[59] As discussed at length in the introductory chapter, the term *Arab* is used henceforth in its oldest and purest sense which denotes an origin in the peoples of the open desert, not a way of life per se. See. J. Retso, *The Arabs in Antiquity: Their History from the Assyrians to the Umayyads* (New York, 2003), 1ff. Thus, one could be settled, semi-settled, or nomadic and still be Arab by origin. This is not the same as the current usage as a nationalistic term. This modern sense refers to a shared culture, language, (but not necessarily religion) which roughly corresponds with the geographic breadth of Arab expansion from the seventh century onward. Nor is it necessarily one with the term denoting people who lived in the Roman province of Arabia per se. Indeed, the Greco-Roman sources themselves are often unconcerned with the nuances of these people and tend to simplify them down to a concrete abstract based on supposed ethnicity, or people who live the life of nomads traveling the desert, living in tents, and herding goats and camels.

[60] F. Millar (1993), 53.

[61] Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica,* 6.33-34, seems to place the synod chronologically during the reign of Gordian, since in 6.29 he has the ascent of Gordian to the throne, the story of Beryllus appears in 6.33 and in 6.34, he has the ascent of Philip to the throne after six years of the reign of Gordian.

did not preexist in his own form before birth and held no innate divinity save as a vessel for the divinity of God. The dispute escalated to the point where Origen, bishop of Caesaria, was summoned to intercede.[62] He did so with such success that Beryllus recanted his views and reembraced the orthodox view.[63] Eusebius does not specifically mention the location of this council, but the ninth century *Libellus Synodicus* states that it was a full provincial council and was held at Bostra.[64] A second subsequent council came under the aegis of Philip the Arab, near the end of his reign (c. 249).[65] Perhaps on the strength of his earlier success, Origen was again summoned, this time to deal with a group of heretics[66] who declared that the soul died along with the body at death, later to be resurrected along with the body in the last days. Origen engaged a

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[62] Ca. 220, Origen had been ordained as a presbyter at Caesaria (Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica,* 6.8.23) and subsequently relocated there in 228. Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 6.26: "ἔτος δ' ἦν τοῦτο δέκατον τῆς δηλουμένης ἡγεμονίας, καθ' ὃ τὴν ἀπ' Ἀλεξανδρείας μετανάστασιν ἐπὶ τὴν Καισάρειαν ὁ Ὠριγένης ποιησάμενος…"

[63] Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 6.33.

[64] Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 6.33. *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio*, G.D. Mansi, ed. (Leipzig, 1692-1769), 1.788): "Synodus divina et faena provincialis, collecta a doctissimo Origene in Bostra Arabiae, quam Isaias olim Botron nominavit, cognomen Bosorae matri divini Jobi: ademendationem sacrisophistae Berilli eiusdem urbis episcopi, qui in Theodoti coriarii sensum prolapsus fuerat, et ad orthodoxam rursus fidem Origenis cohortatione recurrerat."

[65] Born 204, reigned 244-49. Eusebius gives no definite date other than placing it within Philip's reign. At any rate, Fabian was the pope (r. 236-250). *Historia ecclesiastica,* 6.37. Mansi (1.788) dates it to 249, at the end of Philip's reign: "Concilium hoc, teste Eusb. lib. 6. cap. 31. in Arabia celebratum est, anno Philippi imperatoris, qui est Christi 249 & Fabiani pontificis 11. contra haereticos affirmantes, animas hominum mortales este, easque una cum corporibus extingui, et in novissimo die cum iisdem vicissim resuscitari. Origenes in hoc concilio praesens, eos doctissime impugnavit, et simul expugnavit. Eusebii verba haec sunt: Per idem tempus (anno scilicet 4. Philippi imperatoris) quidam rursus in Arabia dogmatis cuiusdam prorus a veritate aliens nascuntur. . ."

[66] Augustine, *De haeresibus*, 83, calls these heretics *Arabici*: "cum eusebii historiam perscrutatus essem, cui rufinus a se in latinam linguam translatae subsequentium etiam temporum duos libros addidit, non inueni aliquam haeresim quam non legerim apud istos, nisi quam in sexto libro ponit eusebius, narrans eam exstitisse in arabia. itaque hos haereticos, quoniam nullum eorum ponit auctorem, arabicos possumus nuncupare qui dixerunt animas cum corporibus mori atque dissolui et in fine saeculi utrumque resurgere. sed hos disputatione origenis praesentis et eos alloquentis celerrime dicit fuisse correctos. iam nunc illae commemorandae sunt haereses quae a nobis non apud istos repertae sunt, sed in recordationem nostram quomodocumque uenerunt."

public debate, in which he again convinced the heretics of their error and reclaimed them for the orthodox faith.[67]

Lacking subscription lists, the exact extent of these councils is unclear. Though the official records of these councils are no longer extant, Eusebius states that he had access to them for his history, and notes that a "large number of bishops" attended the first council,[68] and that the second council was "on a large scale."[69] Nevertheless, the councils were likely limited to the bishops of the province of Arabia only, and Eusebius seemingly mentions them primarily in the context of his discussion of Origen's achievements. Indeed, Origen must have been quite active in Arabia over a long period, because Eusebius earlier mentions his being summoned to Arabia by its provincial governor, who was possibly Furnius Julianus,[70] while he was still living in Alexandria, some thirty years before the two Arab councils, c. 217.[71] He answered the summons,

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[67] Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica,* 6. 37: "Ἄλλοι δ᾽ αὖ πάλιν ἐπὶ τῆς Ἀραβίας κατὰ τὸν δηλούμενον ἐπιφύονται χρόνον δόγματος ἀλλοτρίου τῆς ἀληθείας εἰσηγηταί, οἳ ἔλεγον τὴν ἀνθρωπείαν ψυχὴν τέως μὲν κατὰ τὸν ἐνεστῶτα καιρὸν ἅμα τῇ τελευτῇ συναποθνήσκειν τοῖς σώμασιν καὶ συνδιαφθείρεσθαι, αὖθις δέ ποτε κατὰ τὸν τῆς ἀναστάσεως καιρὸν σὺν αὐτοῖς ἀναβιώσεσθαι. καὶ δὴ καὶ τότε συγκροτηθείσης οὐ σμικρᾶς συνόδου, πάλιν Ὠριγένης παρακληθεὶς καὶ ἐνταῦθα κινήσας τε λόγους ἐπὶ τοῦ κοινοῦ περὶ τοῦ ζητουμένου, οὕτως ἠνέχθη ὡς μετατεθῆναι τὰς τῶν πρότερον ἐσφαλμένων διανοίας."

[68] Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica,* 6.33.

[69] Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica,* 6.37.

[70] The governor may be identified as Furnius Julianus according to a milestone dating to 213/4. See S. Mittmann, "Die römische Straße von Gerasa nach Adraa" *ZDPV* (*Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins*) 80 (1964), 127.

[71] Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 6.19.15: "κατὰ τοῦτον δὲ τὸν χρόνον ἐπ᾽ Ἀλεξανδρείας αὐτῷ τὰς διατριβὰς ποιουμένῳ ἐπιστάς τις τῶν στρατιωτικῶν ἀνεδίδου γράμματα Δημητρίῳ τε τῷ τῆς παροικίας ἐπισκόπῳ καὶ τῷ τότε τῆς Αἰγύπτου ἐπάρχῳ παρὰ τοῦ τῆς Ἀραβίας ἡγουμένου, ὡς ἂν μετὰ (5) σπουδῆς ἁπάσης τὸν Ὠριγένην πέμψοιεν κοινωνήσοντα λόγων αὐτῷ. καὶ δὴ ἀφικνεῖται ἐπὶ τὴν Ἀραβίαν· οὐκ εἰς μακρὸν δὲ τὰ τῆς ἀφίξεως εἰς πέρας ἀγαγών, αὖθις ἐπὶ τὴν Ἀλεξάνδρειαν ἐπανήει."

completed his unidentified task[72] and then returned to Alexandria.[73] These passages suggest that there was some kind of connection between the province of Arabia and Origen that may well account for his later role as an arbitrator in intra-provincial ecclesiastical disputes. It also is worth noting that Origen's summons came through a military courier bearing letters addressed to Demetrius, bishop of the city, and to the governor of Egypt, which reminds us that imperial relations with the Christian church were not uniformly hostile. And all of these activities indicate that by the mid third century, the church in Arabia must have included a substantial number of episcopal sees, occasioning regional meetings to settle disputes, and the involvement of an influential outside mediator.

The role of Philip

The emperor Philip's strong local connections could have played a role in the convening of these councils as well. Philip, officially known as Marcus Julius Phillipus, was born in Shahba (modern Shuhba), about 55 miles southeast of Damascus on the road to Bostra, and near to the

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[72] Eusebius doesn't mention the reason for this visit. Trimingham suggests that the governor of Arabia may have merely wanted more information on the growing Christian sects in the area, and even Christianity in general. See Trimingham (1979), 56. The summons of the young Origen speaks to his authority outside of Alexandria even at that early time. Indeed, Eusebius relates that a few years later (218) Julia Mammaea, Augusta, sent for Origen while she was visiting Antioch for the purpose of learning more about the Christian faith. See Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica,* 6.21; Trimingham (1979), 56. Eusebius gives other details of Origen's involvement in Arabia. In 6.38 Origen deals with the Helkisite heresy and finally, he intervened in a controversey involving a certain Arab bishop, Heraclides and his fellow bishops. See J. Scherer, *Entretien d'Origene avec Heraclide et les eveques, ses collegues, sur le Pere, le Fils, et l'ame* (Cairo, 1949). None of these apparently occasioned formal councils.

[73] The passage makes a veiled reference to a campaign of violence in Alexandria, which may in fact be Caracalla's massacre in 215. Origen's early visit to Arabia must have occurred sometime before this. See Eusebius, *The History of the Church from Christ to Constantine*, trans., G.A. Williamson (New York, 1966), 260.

province of Arabia, whose father was a high ranking leader of brigands.[74] His father became a Roman citizen, took the name Julius Marinus, and was eventually deified by his son, as attested on coins of Philip's reign.[75] Philip's Arab descent is difficult to trace, given his father's adopted Roman name, but Zosimus states that he was an Arab,[76] which, combined with Aurelius Victor's statement that he was a leader of brigands, leads one to think he was perhaps a nomad leader (*sheikh*), since they were often characterized by the Romans as a race of thieves.[77]

Philip first came to official notice during the Gordian III's campaign against Shapur I. The praetorian prefect, Timesitheus died and Philip's brother Priscus suggested that Philip take his place. Shortly thereafter, Gordian died, either murdered, or in battle, depending on the account, and Philip then assumed the throne as emperor. After making a peace treaty with Shapur, Philip traveled west to cement his power and left Priscus to rule the eastern provinces.[78]

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[74] Aurelius Victor, *De caesaribus*, 28.1-4: "humillimo ortus loco fuit, patre nobilissimo latronum ductore." See Aurelius Victor, *De caesaribus*, trans. H.W. Bird (Liverpool, 1994).

[75] Attested on coins of his reign.

[76] Zosimus, *Historia nova*, 1.18: "Φιλίππου γὰρ ὑπάρχου προχειρισθέντος, κατὰ βραχὺ τὰ τῆς εἰς τὸν βασιλέα τῶν στρατιωτῶν εὐνοίας ὑπέρρει. **(3.)** Ὁρμώμενος γὰρ ἐξ Ἀραβίας, ἔθνους χειρίστου, καὶ οὐδὲ ἐκ τοῦ βελτίονος εἰς τύχης ἐπίδοσιν προελθών, ἅμα τῷ παραλαβεῖν τὴν ἀρχὴν εἰς ἐπιθυμίαν βασιλείας ἐτράπη·"

[77] Hence Zosimus's Ἀραβίας, ἔθνους χειρίστου and Ammianus's treatment of Saracens (14.4.1).

[78] H.A. Pohlsander, "Philip the Arab and Christianity," *Historia* 29 (1980), 468.

Figure 42: Antoninianus of Philip the Arab, 244-247 CE

Philip's stance towards Christianity was controversial. Eusebius seemed to confirm his
Christianity, as did Jerome, and many other ancient sources.[79] Modern scholarship is split on the
matter. Eusebius relates the story of the emperor attempting to join Easter celebrations in the
church of bishop Babylus in Antioch (c. 350) and being told to stand with the penitents.[80] At this
insistence, Philip accepted the discipline piously.[81] Leontius, a later patriarch of Antioch (344-
58) confirms this episode and names the martyr Babylas as the presiding bishop, as well as
stating that the empress Otacilia Severa had to conform to the same penance.[82] Origen himself

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[79] Full discussion in Pohlsander (1980), 463-73.

[80] Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 6.34: "Ἔτεσιν δὲ ὅλοις ἓξ Γορδιανοῦ τὴν Ῥωμαίων διανύσαντος
ἡγεμονίαν, Φίλιππος ἅμα παιδὶ Φιλίππῳ τὴν ἀρχὴν διαδέχεται. τοῦτον κατέχει λόγος Χριστιανὸν ὄντα ἐν
ἡμέρᾳ τῆς ὑστάτης τοῦ πάσχα παννυχίδος τῶν ἐπὶ τῆς ἐκκλησίας εὐχῶν τῷ πλήθει μετασχεῖν ἐθελῆσαι, οὐ
πρότερον δὲ ὑπὸ (5) τοῦ τηνικάδε προεστῶτος ἐπιτραπῆναι εἰσβαλεῖν, ἢ ἐξομολο-γήσασθαι καὶ τοῖς ἐν
παραπτώμασιν ἐξεταζομένοις μετανοίας τε χώραν ἴσχουσιν ἑαυτὸν καταλέξαι· ἄλλως γὰρ μὴ ἄν ποτε πρὸς
αὐτοῦ, μὴ οὐχὶ τοῦτο ποιήσαντα, διὰ πολλὰς τῶν κατ᾽ αὐτὸν αἰτίας παραδεχθῆναι. καὶ πειθαρχῆσαί γε (10)
προθύμως λέγεται, τὸ γνήσιον καὶ εὐλαβὲς τῆς περὶ τὸν θεῖον φόβον διαθέσεως ἔργοις ἐπιδεδειγμένον."

[81] Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica,* 7.34.

[82] *Chronicon Paschale*, ad ann. 253, in J.P. Migne, ed., *Patrologia Graeca* 92 (1865), col. 665-8.

also apparently held direct correspondence with Philip and his wife.[83] This fact alone does not prove that Philip was Christian by baptism, but it does show an interest and sympathy with Christians. Also, in favor of this view is the fact that Philip left Christians in peace, unlike many other emperors of this time. Indeed, Eusebius quotes his source Dionysius of Alexandria as saying that Philip's reign had been "kinder to us [Christians]" than the succeeding one, alluding to the first empire-wide Christian persecutions under emperor Decius.[84] Finally, of Philip's reign as a whole, Eusebius says that "the faith spread and our doctrine was proclaimed boldly before all."[85] Indeed, Decius's subsequent persecution of Christians (249-51) could be seen, at least in part, as a reaction to the favorable position of Christianity under Philip.[86] At the most, one can safely conclude that Philip was at least neutral towards Christians in Arabia.

That this is as far as Philip's Christianity may be pushed is also indicated by the fact that when he supervised the celebrations for the thousand year anniversary of the founding of Rome in 248, Philip acted in his official capacity of *pontifex maximus* over the pagan rites.[87] Further, Philip's coinage bears no hint of Christian symbols, and he had his predecessor Gordian deified

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Chrysostom also relates the story. See Chrysostom, *De S. Babyla contra Gentes*, 1.541.

[83] Described by St. Vincent of Lerins, who had access to the letters. See *The Commonitorium of Vincentius of Lerins*, R.S. Moxon, ed. (Cambridge, 1909), 43.

[84] Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica,* 6.41.9: "καὶ ταῦτα ἐπὶ πολὺ μὲν τοῦτον ἤκμασεν τὸν τρόπον, διαδεξαμένηδὲ τοὺς ἀθλίους ἡ στάσις καὶ πόλεμος ἐμφύλιος τὴν καθ' ἡμῶν ὠμότητα πρὸς ἀλλήλους αὐτῶν ἔτρεψεν, καὶ σμικρὸν μὲν προσανεπνεύσαμεν, ἀσχολίαν τοῦ πρὸς ἡμᾶς θυμοῦ *(5)* λαβόντων, εὐθέως δὲ ἡ τῆς βασιλείας ἐκείνης τῆς εὐμενεστέρας ἡμῖν μεταβολὴ διήγγελται, καὶ πολὺς ὁ τῆς ἐφ' ἡμᾶς ἀπειλῆς φόβος ἀνετείνετο."

[85] Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica,* 6.36.

[86] Trimingham (1979)*,* 60.

[87] Zosimus, *Historia nova*, 2.1-7; See also J. Gagé, "Recherches sur les jeux séculaires," *Revue des études latines* 10 (1932), 441-57 & 11 (1933), 172-202, 400-35.

as well as his own father Marinus.[88] However, besides the deifications, subsequent Christian emperors continued many official practices held over from pagan times. Perhaps the most telling evidence against a strong Christian bias on the part of Philip is that no pagan source mentions the fact. Philip clearly continued to have a strong connection to his native land after assuming the title of Emperor. This is evidenced by the fact that he elevated his home village of Shabha to the rank of a town, renaming it Philippopolis, and at the same time he raised Bostra to the rank of a metropolis.[89] It may be, therefore, not only that Philip's friendly attitude toward Christians included those in the province of Arabia, but even that the extent of Christianity in Philip's place of origin influenced him in his tolerance of Christianity.

In the larger scheme, the evidence clearly indicates that Christianity advanced to become a strong and vital institution in Arabia during the third century. The holding of regional councils there in this period underscores this fact, as do the connections of Arab Christianity with the community and empire at large, and its influential religious and secular authorities. Finally, in these two councils there are early indications of a local theological front (bishops) united against an outside force (Origen) aimed at "correcting" the local error. The involvement of the emperor Philip himself perhaps echoes the interest of the state in smoothing over such local controversies in the favor of imperial unity, a goal which the emperor Constantine I seems to have had when he called the first major ecumenical council at Nicea in 325, for the purpose of condemning Arianism.

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[88] Pohlsander (1980), 467.

[89] Aurelius Victor, *De caesaribus*, 28.1.

Nicaea 325

The next appearance of bishops from Arabia in a conciliar context appears at the Council of Nicaea. Six bishops from the province attended, including Bostra, Philadelphia, Jabrudi, Sodom, Betharna and Dionysias.[90] Lacking the *acta* for this council, it is unclear exactly what position Arab delegates had in the proceedings and final decision. One expects that bishops from the area of Palestine and Arabia would lean to the Arian side based on circumstantial evidence: (1) Arius himself took refuge in Palestine with Eusebius, bishop of Caesaria (the metropolitan of Palestine), following his expulsion from Alexandria under charges of heresy.[91] (2) Following the council of Constantinople in 381, which is discussed below, Gregory, bishop of Nyssa was dispatched to Arabia to correct the churches there.[92] Exactly what Gregory was supposed to correct is unknown. The specific mention of Arab churches needing correction by an outside authority appointed by the ecumenical council suggests that the positions of Arab bishops at Constantinople was controversial enough to warrant such action. There is no reason to suppose that this had not been the case in Arabia for some time, especially when put next to the two previous regional councils in Arabia in which an outside authority had been summoned to resolve a controversy.

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[90] Following the subscription lists in *Patrum Nicaenorum nomina Latine, Graece, Coptice, Syriace, Arabice, Armeniace*, H. Gelzer, H. Higenfeld, O. Cuntz, eds., Second Edition. (Stuttgart, 1995).

[91] J. Buhagiar, "The Shaping of Christian Thought: The Councils of Nicaea and Constantinople," in H. Badr, ed., *Christianity: A History in the Middle East* (Beirut, 2005), 162. Origen, a former bishop of Caeasaria also held christological views akin to Arianism.

[92] Gregory of Nyssa, *Epistulae*, 2.12: "ἐμοὶ διὰ τὴν ἀνάγκην ταύτην, ἐν ᾗ ζῆν ἐτάχθην παρὰ τοῦ οἰκονομοῦντος ἡμῶν τὴν ζωήν, ἐγένετο ≤πρόσταγμα≥ τῆς ἁγίας συνόδου, διορθώσεως ἕνεκεν τῆς κατὰ τὴν Ἀραβίαν ἐκκλησίας, μέχρι τῶν τόπων γενέσθαι·" See Gregory of Nyssa, *Epistulae*, P. Maraval, ed. (Paris, 1990).

Constantinople 381 & 394

     A second ecumenical council, in effect the second round of Nicaea, was called at

Constantinople by Theodosius in 381 to settle the remaining issues of the Arian debate with a

view to creating a unified Christological doctrine. At least four bishops of Arabia attended, but

there was no representative from Bostra, since this city was in dispute at the time. After the

bishop of Bostra, Titus, died, Bagadios was elected as his replacement. An unspecified dispute

with Palestine then arose and a number of bishops from outside Arabia, led by Cyril of

Jerusalem, had deposed Bagadios in favor of an Agapios.[93] In response to this, the first council

of Constantinople appointed Gregory of Nyssa to settle the controversy. But, he seems to have

failed in this task and the dispute between Palestine and Arabia only died down on the death of

the two competing bishops.[94] At the least, this is a case of outside interference on the part of

Palestine in the appointment of a locally chosen bishop in the province of Arabia. If the parochial

independence of Arabia was clearly understood at this point, then why would the council have to

send Gregory to settle the dispute? There really wouldn't have been a question to settle. Perhaps

religious jurisdiction was blurred in this case, or there was some theology of the Arabian bishop

was contested by the bishops of Palestine? One factor in this might have been the growing power

of the bishop of Jerusalem as this see moved towards status as a patriarchate in the succeeding

decades. The details of this dispute bring into question the overall independence of the Church in

Arabia and its actual jurisdictional status. This issue would continue to resonate and eventually

come to a head at the councils of Ephesus in 431 and Chalcedon in 451.

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[93] Trimingham (1979), 82. Bagadios and Agapios are Arab names. There are no specific details as to the issue
behind this dispute, whether it be political or theological, or both. See also I. Shahid (1989), 523.

[94] Mansi (1760), 1449ff.; Trimingham (1979), 82. See also I. Shahid (1989), 523 on the Arab bishops at this
council.

Ephesus 431 & Chalcedon 451

The first council of Ephesus was a watershed for churches of the east by virtue of its condemnation of Nestorius and his theology of the dual nature of Christ as human but bearing the divine Logos in his soul.[95] This position was the basis of united resistance among the delegates from Arabia and Palestine III throughout the first four rounds of voting. Only in the fifth did they give in and follow the lead of their Antiochene patriarch in support of the majority party of Cyril of Alexandria. One Arabian bishop, Zosius of Esbus was excommunicated and the bishop of Bostra, Antiochus, just escaped a similar condemnation.[96]

Theodosius reorganized the province of Palestine into three units from the previous two. Palestine I included Judaea, Samaria, the coast and Peraea. The governor was based in Caesaria. Palestine II included Galilee, the lower Jezreel Valley, lands east of Galilee and the western sector of the former Decapolis. The governor was seated at Scythopolis. Palestine III (also known as Palestina Salutaris) included the desert regions of the Negev, southern Jordan (formerly part of the province Arabia) and Sinai. Petra was the provincial capital.[97] The fact that Palestine III included part of what had been Arabia as well as the other desert territories made its inhabitants much more akin to those of the province of Arabia itself than those of Palestine I and II. Thus Palestine III and Arabia voted as a block at the council of Ephesus, and their position fell on the side of Nestorianism. This confraternity of Palestine III and Arabia extended to the peoples who lived within the Persian desert zones as well.

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[95] Ephesus also reaffirmed the Nicene Creed of 381.

[96] Mansi (1760), 1170-1178; J. Hefele-Leclerc, *History of the Church Councils* (Paris, 1908), 44ff.

[97] *Barrington Atlas*

On the frontiers and within Persian territory, this council precipitated an outright breakaway of many cities which supported Nestorianism. Hence, this council marks the formation of the independent Assyrian Church of the east. Henceforward, the Nestorian bishops of this church would attend a series of independent councils held in 410, 430, 485, 499 and 588.[98] Thus, we see that the religious interests of the desert inhabitants of Palestine III and Arabia were one with the desert dwellers of the Persian frontiers, indicating a regional religious dichotomy which transcended provincial boundaries, but which may indeed mirror other cultural dichotomies, such as the hellenized versus non-hellenized peoples.

A major center for this brand of Christianity was Hira, on the Persian frontiers in northwestern Arabia. The ruling Lakhmid dynasty begun by 'Amr and later Imru' ul-Qays would protect this Christian population and shift allegiances between Persia and Rome depending on the political-religious policies which prevailed at the time. In the early fourth century this dynasty had been allied with Rome, perhaps as a response to Sassanid persecution of Christians within Persian territory. However, as Roman Christian doctrine became more set in the next century, Hira seems to have moved once more into the Persian fold. The Nestorian controversy could perhaps have provided good motivation for this shift.[99]

The council of Chalcedon in 451 created an opposite watershed, by condemning those who thought the nature of Christ was unified, or Monophysites, as they became known. This had direct ramifications in Arabia and Palestine, because the church there reflected the popularity of the monophysitic view in the region. Twenty bishops from the province of Arabia alone were present. A large number of these favored the Monophysite position. The council's move to

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[98] J.B. Chabot, *Synodicon Orientale* (Paris, 1942).

[99] Trimingham (1979)*,* 154ff.

define Christ's nature as dual alienated a majority of the Arab delegates, who refused to accept the explanation. Led by Dioscorus, Patriarch of Alexandria and a chief advocate of monophysitism, a major schism occurred in which the dissenting (monophysitic) churches defected.[100]

The Dissent of the Arabian Church

Following the early Arabian councils of the third century forward to the fifth century ecumenical councils, a pattern develops whereby the Arabian bishops seem slowly to fall away from the assenting position. Origen is able to convince the heretics of their ways and there is a unified and happy ending. Arab bishops at Nicaea appear to have signed the bottom line without dispute. Constantinople in 381 highlighted important divisions between Palestine I/II and Arabia. The First Council of Ephesus and Chalcedon in 451 witnessed outright dissent and schisms between Arabia/Palestine III and the ecumenical signatories. This dichotomy is played out in the reaction of the Arab delegates who attended the two fifth century councils of Ephesus and Chalcedon. These delegates were placed in a delicate position, between representing the views of the laity and following the 'orthodox' views of the councils. Hence, at Ephesus, the delegates resisted the majority decision for some time before most gave in, while at Chalcedon the resistance was even more stout. This religious tightrope could become a political one as well, as evidenced by the fact that some of these delegates could well have a political role on their home regions.

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[100] Mansi (1762), 2ff. This movement is reflected today in the Alexandrian, Syriac and Armenian churches. See H. Badr, ed., *Christianity: A History in the Middle East* (Beirut, 2005), 209ff.; V.C. Samuel, *The Council of Chalcedon Re-Examined* (Madras, 1977), 84ff.

The career of Asad Aspebetos[101] , one of the Arab bishops who attended the first council of Ephesus, serves well to illustrate this point. We first hear of him in relation to the life of the ascetic Euthymius. Euthymius, with his companion Theoctistus, had set off into the desert near the Dead Sea to find a place of refuge. They eventually found it in the caves of the gorge of Wadi Mu'ullak. Once established here, a community of monks formed around them. Among the visitors to this monastery was an Arab sheikh, Aspebetos, along with a group of nomads who had come to see Euthymius. Euthymius was unavailable at the time, but Theoctistus received him and Aspebet, accompanied by his partially paralyzed son Terebon, gave an account of the Christian persecutions of Yazdagird I within Persian territory. He told of how the persecutions had caused many of the Christians within the frontier zone to move into Roman territory seeking protection. The Persian king attempted to stop this movement with the aid of his Arab allies on the frontiers. Aspebetos was one of these powerful allied leaders, but he refused to hand over the Christian refugees, and helped them to escape instead. When the Persians discovered this, Aspebetos himself moved his people into Roman territory (c. 420). Reaching the Roman zone he was recognized as a phylarch by the Master of Soldiers of the east, Anatolius.[102]

Aspebetos was not Christian himself but had sought out Euthymius because the Persian magi had been unable to cure his son's paralysis and he hoped that Euthymius might help. Euthymius, hearing this, left his retreat and prayed for Terebon, who was subsequently healed.

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[101] The name Aspebetos is not a personal name, but actually a title meaning "Master of the horse". See Socrates Scholasticus, *Historia ecclesiastica,* 7.18; Augustine, *City of God*, 18.52; Trimingham (1979), 109.

[102] Cyril of Scythopolis, *Life of Saint Euthymius*, 3.1-3. Aspebet's grandson, Terebon II told the story to Cyril. In 421, Theodosius II successfully led his armies against the Persian Bahram V, In the peace treaty which followed, both sides agreed to allow freedom of worship for Christians and Mazdaeans within their respective territories. See Trimingham (1979), 109.

Aspebetos and his company then agreed to be baptized by Euthymius, and the sheikh received the name Peter.[103] Aspebetos's brother became a monk at the monastery. Sometime after this, Aspebetos returned to Euthymius with a band of new converts to be baptized. Aspebetos stated that he had handed over his secular power to his son and now sought to serve Christ, hoping to settle near Euthymius with his followers. Euthymius agreed and a new nomad settlement was founded which became known as the *paremboles*, or "camps". This settlement grew in size and Aspebetos was eventually consecrated as its bishop by Juvenal, bishop of Jerusalem (425-59). Aspebetos's title was "bishop of the encampments" to mark the nomad character of the community.

At the council of Ephesus in 431, bishop Peter (Aspebetos) was a member of the commission charged with interviewing Nestorius and was one of the four who eventually voted along with the majority to depose him, this under the advice of Euthymius, who counseled him to follow the opinion of Cyril of Alexandria and Acacius of Meletine. Peter died before the second council of Ephesus in 449. His successor was an Auxilaos, who adopted the title "bishop of the Allied Saracens," and signed along with the party in favor of Eutyches (and thus against Euthymius). Auxilaos's successor, John, signed under the title "bishop of the nation of the Saracens" at Chalcedon in 451, and voted in favor of the majority under the advice of Euthymius.[104] Other bishops of this see took part at the councils of Jerusalem in 518 (Valens) and 536 (Peter II).[105]

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[103] Butrus in Arabic.

[104] Mansi (1762), 2ff.

[105] Trimingham (1979), 111.

The see of Edessa experienced a similar dilemma. Rabulla, bishop of Edessa during the first council of Ephesus was at first not opposed to Nestorius, but eventual gave way to pressure from Cyril and enforced the anti-Nestorian platform in his see. However, this brought him resistance from his own laity and the theological college of the city whom he had alienated by his adoption of the 'orthodox' position. His successor, Ibas, refused to vote with the majority at the second council of Ephesus, thus supporting the views of his laity, and suffered excommunication as a result. Ibas and others were eventually restored at Chalcedon.

The story of Aspebetos is an example of how the Arab tribes of the frontiers were caught up in the religious and political dynamic of relations between Rome and Persia in late antiquity. The vacillation of the bishops of his line underscores the dichotomy described above, and their tendency to be pulled to and fro by the two sides at the councils. The events also illustrate how influential the monastic orders could be as missionaries, not just of Christianity, but of religious policy at the councils, especially among the nomads who would come under the patronage of desert ascetics much more frequently than members of the Church leadership of the towns and cities. As time passed, these monks increasingly fell on the anti-imperial side of religious debates in the councils. This situation came to a head in the sixth century, when imperial vicissitudes became serious religious and political divisions within the eastern provinces. Arab peoples were at the heart of this division, and the struggle came to a head in 518 at the council of Jerusalem, now the central battleground between the Chalcedonian and Monophysite controversy.[106]

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[106] Mansi (1761), 503ff.; P.R.L. Brown, *The Rise of Western Christendom*, Third Edition (Oxford, 2013), 166ff.

Jerusalem 518

The authority of Euthymius and partial success in herding the Arab bishops towards support of the Chalcedonian view was actually an anomaly within the region. More often, native bishops of Syria, Arabia and Palestine III tended to maintain a distance from Roman dictated policy, and indeed any imperial pressure for them to conform ultimately increased the polarization. Thus, Monophysitism eventually reigned supreme among the laity, monks and clergy of these provinces. This state of affairs is underscored by the mixed fate of bishop Juvenal of Jerusalem in the aftermath of Chalcedon in 451. Juvenal had supported Eutyches at the council of Ephesus in 449.[107] This put him in a position to seize control of the bishoprics of Arabia and Phoenicia from Antioch. However, facing the loss of his seat at Chalcedon for his support of Monophysites, he switched positions and voted to condemn the Monophysites.[108] He agreed to return control of the usurped provinces to Antioch and his reward was to have his see raised to the status of a patriarchate. However, the majority of the monks in his see and the laity which backed them rebelled against Juvenal and other supporting bishops, forcing them from their positions. Juvenal and his followers had to resort to Marcian and imperial intervention to suppress this revolt and return to their offices. The aftermath of this conflict saw the forcible elimination of the responsible Monophysite monks, many of whom fled into the desert to begin new settlements.[109]

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[107] Samuel (1977), 29ff.

[108] Mansi (1760), 1170-1178.

[109] Trimingham (1979), 113.

However, things took a complete turnaround with the rise of Anastasius to the throne and his adoption of a Monophysitic program in hopes of gaining the support of the populace in the eastern provinces. This culminated in the council of Jerusalem in 518 where Anastasius attempted to assert Monophysitism on legal footing in the Church, despite the intense resistance of provinces in Europe.[110] The conflict ended with the death of Anastasius that year and the crowning of his successor Justin I, who, under mandate from the Roman patriarch, made the Church exclusively Chalcedonian with the elimination of all Monophysite bishops and clergy, including those of Antioch and Alexandria.[111] Outright persecution of Monophysites in the empire was underway by 525. Throughout the rest of the sixth century, forcible coercion of the religious community in the eastern provinces became the rule.

Lack of Communication?

The slow defection of the Arabian church played out in the councils of Ephesus, Chalcedon and Jerusalem mirrors what is happening in other frontier regions of the east at the same time, such as the desert regions of Syria and the Persian frontiers. As mentioned above, what is different about the peoples of these regions in comparison with others of the east is their relative lack of hellenization. The culture of the Greco-Roman conquerors simply did not penetrate into the desert regions as easily as in the more settled regions. This lack of cultural communication created a corresponding lack of cultural unity.

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[110] Mansi (1762), 578ff.

[111] J.A.S. Evans, "The Monophysite Persecution under Justin I: The Eastern View," *The Ancient World* 27/2 (1996), 191-96.

Egeria witnessed evidence of this politico-religious dichotomy in the space of her travels in the region. "In this province [Palestine] there are some people who know both Greek and Syriac, but others know only one or the other. The bishop may know Syriac, but never uses it. He always speaks in Greek but has a presbyter beside him who translates the Greek into Syriac, so that everyone can understand what he means. Similarly, the lessons read in church have to be read in Greek, but there is always someone in attendance to translate into Syriac so that the people can understand."[112] Hence, the majority of people in this region were Aramaic, not Hellenistic.

The result is that Christianity in Arabia, as in Syria and Mesopotamia, solidified over time into distinctly different manifestations. Within the Byzantine sphere, the two opposing centers which developed were Antioch and Edessa. The Greek speaking population identified with Antioch and the Nicene view, while the Syriac speaking population identified with Edessa and the Monophysite view. Within the boundaries of Persia, the now separatist and officially independent Christian population identified with Nestorianism. The root of the division lay in the lack of direct communication between Antioch and the native Aramaic masses, strengthening the feeling on the part of the people that their Byzantine masters were in fact alien to them. Monastic orders filled this gap and brought their influence to bear on the people, and this influence was Monophysitic in Syria and Arabia and Nestorian in Mesopotamia and northwestern Arabia.[113]

Within the Roman sphere in Arabia and Syria there was an innate dichotomy between the Greek cultured leadership of the towns and cities and the Aramaic cultured masses. This dichotomy gradually became also one between the official stance of the Roman church and that

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[112] *Egeria's Travels*, ed. J. Wilkinson, (London, 1971), 146.

[113] Trimingham (1979), 159.

of the popular church in these provinces. The more doctrine became set at the 'orthodox' state level in the eastern empire, the more the 'people's' church became separate in spirit and practice. As Baynes states, this phenomenon presented Rome with a perpetual problem in the region.[114]

Conclusions: Proto-Arab "Nationalism?"

The story of the dichotomy between the Hellenistic church and the Aramaean church in Arabia and other like-cultured provinces really begins with the veneer of administration and culture which the wake of Alexander had superimposed upon the lands which his successors had ruled for centuries. This veneer had proved quite thin in practice, and the indigenous currents beneath it had periodically swelled to the surface, as evident at Umm el-Jimal. These are manifest in the whittling away of the Seleucid sphere by regional uprisings, and its ultimate downfall under the popular revolt of the Parthians in the third century B.C.E. and the more recent nationalist fervor of the Sassanids and the New Persian revival. It can even be seen in the program of Cleopatra, last of the Ptolemy's, ultimately seeking popular support and legitimization of her rule through adoption of the native religion of the pharaohs. The Romans inherited this world and the problems inherent in ruling an ancient, and culturally diverse sphere, as foreign conquerors.

The circumstances and events of the councils presented here are a reflection of this phenomenon and its development throughout the imperial period of the third through sixth centuries. The two unprecedented councils held at Bostra might be seen in two dimensions: the one the outbreak of native heresy and the paternal guidance of orthodox authority, the second the privilege and interest bestowed upon a fringe province by a sympathetic Philip. If the events of

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[114] N.H. Baynes, *Byzantine Studies and Other Essays* (London, 1955), 12.

Nicaea are too blurry to judge from the Arab perspective, we can at least say the Arabia had a strong interest in this council and its issues, evidenced by the breadth of Arab representation there, and the issue of Arianism itself, which held important consequences for the dioceses of the region. Indeed, this council marks fully the beginning of an era in which imperial religious policies would directly dictate the fates of the Christian populace on the eastern frontiers.

The two councils of Ephesus and the aftermath of Chalcedon became turning points for the bishops of Arabia, faced with the pressure of political expediency on one side, and the popular resistance of an active Aramaean populace on the other. Tensions under the surface made their full force known, by virtue of the breakaway of the Nestorian Church in 431, the rise of Monophysitism as a dominant force in Arabia in 449 and the overt and direct resistance of the Aramaic Christians to the decrees of Chalcedon in 451. The more hardline the "state" religion became, the more distant Christians in Arabia and its sister provinces Christians became from the mainstream. The council of Jerusalem in 518 became their last stand, before Justin and his successor Justinian soundly and systematically removed the protesting element by force.

If these Arab stirrings can be seen as something akin to dormant nationalism, then the coming of Islam marks their fruition. The birth and rapid spread of Islam in Arabia and its bordering desert regions is resounding in light of the religious and political alienation of these peoples from their Roman masters in the preceding centuries. Thus, in many ways the path to an imperial state religion in the Roman Empire, paved by the succession of Church councils, well prepared the way for the rise of its own future conquerors in the seventh century.

CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation is about centering the landscape, peoples, culture and religion of the late-Roman frontier in Arabia, a land geographically situated between great empires, but a unique zone in its own right. To access the nature and identity of this land is a journey not just through the harsh physical mandates of a desert frontier, but through the intellectual frontiers of Greco-Roman versus Persian, east versus west, civilized versus savage, settled versus nomadic, and orthodox versus heretical. To study the frontier in Arabia is also to study the concept of frontiers in general. On a map, frontiers are lines. In reality they are complex zones of interaction and contact points between different geographies, economies, languages, religions and cultures. Frontiers have tensions which make them theatres of war and conflicts over social, religious, and state identity. The peoples who lived in the zone of Arabia were involved in a process of negotiating their place as the agents of their own identities, not as the objects of powers around them. They existed in their own right, not vis-à-vis Rome and Persia.

On the surface, Arabia is and always has been a land shaped by physical geography. It is the physical which provides the overt basis for the frontier designation. It was a land too harsh to support conventional military invasion by Rome and Persia, or extension of settled culture beyond its bounds. Yet, Arabia was of crucial economic and strategic importance to Rome and Persia as a crossroads and connection between places. The economy was nomadic and camel herding, which provided subsistence for the people of the desert and products of exchange with the villages on the edge of the desert. Arabia held importance as a link between Southeast Asia, Africa and Europe. The camel culture was the economic pin for trade between the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean. Camels were the ships to the sea of the desert.

Only the nomads of the desert understood and were adapted to this sea, so they occupied a position of importance and leverage in the context of the civilizations on either side. Being the masters of their environment, they could not be controlled by the outside. Instead, they were coopted as allies. Yet these allies chose with whom to partner and cannily shifted their allegiances with Rome and Persia as necessary to maximize their advantage. The story of Jadhima, 'Imr' ul-Qays and the Lakhmid dynasty is very illustrative of this dynamic. Nevertheless, the empires on their fringe did impose evolutionary pressures on the nomads. Over time the effect was for the individual peoples to coalesce into larger confederacies, from the Lakhm and Tanukh in the fourth century to the Ghassanid and Kinda in the fifth and sixth. Finally, by at least the fifth century, the Romans were recruiting Arab nomadic units directly into the mobile and frontier armies.

Rome and Persian clearly knew and understood the strategic importance of Arabia and the impossibility of controlling it directly. So, the two powers negotiated with the nomadic leaders and confederacies as necessary. At first thought, one sees the motive of harnessing the unique military skills of the nomads against the enemy on the other side of the frontier. However, the very wildness and effectiveness of the nomads on their own ground ultimately made them an element of insecurity and fear to the settled peoples of Rome and Persia alike. Allying with them was one way to control this fear, another was to build fortifications, such as those of the *Strata Traiana* and *Diocletiana* on the Roman side. These lines of fortifications were not aimed at keeping nomads out, but rather securing routes of communication and trade against raids. They were to control movement along and through the frontier to a degree, not stop it. This is because the settled zone and the nomadic zone interacted with each other as a factor of everyday life. The archaeological and epigraphic evidence at cities such as Umm el-Jimal proves these contacts and

the existence of a culture unique to the transitional zone itself. As the Roman Empire aged into the fifth and sixth centuries, pressures elsewhere in the empire as well as shifting imperial priorities and policies saw a withdrawal from attempts at direct control of the Arabian frontier, in favor of greater reliance on allied nomadic confederacies for local security. So, the fortifications were abandoned and local gravity strengthened, bringing a new and even more prosperous age to the region.

The frontier in Arabia also provides an interesting context for understanding dynamics between the local and the imperial layers of identity. We have seen this in the way the nomads negotiated their power with Rome and Persia, and in the way the nomadic and settled peoples shared a unique cultural identity which was a fusion of their own cultures and those of the external powers who had occupied the region in succession. Finally, religion also provides an interesting context for understanding local gravity in the face of imperial gravity.

On the Roman side this dynamic evolved through the church councils which marked a steady attempt to impose a vision of orthodoxy on the practice of Christianity across the empire. The peoples of Palestine, Arabia and Egypt tended to adopt theological stances which put them at odds with Constantinople and Syria. As emperors became more and more rigid and intent on unifying the church from the time of Theodosius onward to Justinian, bishops from Palestine II and Arabia at the councils show increasing resistance to reforms and accusations of heresy, even in the face of direct imperial threats. Further, the Nestorian church, which was expelled from the Roman Empire after the council of Ephesus in 449, sought refuge on the Persian frontier. Nestorianism would have an important role in shifting nomadic alliances back from Persia to Rome in the face of persecutions by King Shapur II. The steady alienation of Christians in the

region may be an important factor in the ease of conversion to Islam, which embraced and protected diverse expression to a much greater degree.

This project provides a good methodological foundation upon which to expand the study into the larger context of nomadic peoples, the wilderness, frontiers and liminal spaces across the Roman and Persian worlds. How did nomads function comparatively in other frontier dynamics, such as the North African, Armenian, Asian and Nordic regions in the case of Rome, and Indian and Central Asian regions in the case of Persia? In turn, this provides the basis for a new comprehensive work on nomadic peoples and frontiers throughout the globe during the ancient and early medieval periods.

Another interest of this dissertation has been to unite ancient and modern theory on frontiers with a view to exploring and engaging historiographic dichotomies within the academy and humanities in general. It is of future interest to continue in this direction, perhaps by pursuing co-authored or multi-authored projects across temporal and intellectual fields.

Finally, this project is about a certain time and place in the ancient world. However, the concepts, questions and answers pursued here are relevant to the study of any type of frontier, in past or present space in which geographies, peoples, cultures, languages and beliefs meet. It is in these spaces that the identities not only of the center, but of the surrounding margins are best studied and understood.

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