

Nabataean Settlements and Roman Occupation in Arabia Petraea

Brünnow and Domaszewski's fundamental survey of Roman remains in Arabia terminates with the environs of Petra, the spectacular site of the old Nabatean capital nestled in the ash-Sharah mountains of southern Jordan. In an appendix, they provided reports by nineteenth century travelers of the region further south, but it is the subsequent pioneering exploration of this provincial sector by A. Musil, N. Glueck, A. Alt, F. Frank, Sir Aurel Stein, G. L. Harding and A. Kirkbride that has contributed most to our understanding of the region. Nevertheless, their efforts represented mere forays into this expansive desert wilderness. Even more recent archaeological enterprises in the region have focused almost entirely on the impressive royal seat of the Nabataean realm, neglecting the more dismal and seemingly desolate surrounding region. As a consequence, the environs of Petra and southern Jordan has remained virtually an archaeological *terra incognita*. The region is depicted on maps as a territory almost devoid of any major settlements, leaving the impression that it was a virtual No-Man's-Land, with at most a few scattered oases and caravan halts.

During the last decade, however, more systematic surveys and excavations have produced new evidence for evaluating the nature of the settlement pattern of this region during the Nabataean-Roman era. Although I have chosen to designate this desert hinterland as "Arabia Petraea," I am fully aware that this nomenclature needs clarification. As a region, it is not to be equated with the second century geographer Ptolemy's district of that name, which he distinguished from "Deserta" and "Felix," the other geographical sections of his tripartite division of Arabia. Later ancient geographers and cartographers ignored this part of his terminology, perhaps because "Petraea" was essentially synonymous with and certainly

no more descriptive than the term "Nabataea."¹ What I have in mind by this designation is a more constricted territory of the Nabataean realm, embracing most of what was "southern Edom," but including the Ḥisma desert south of the Edomite plateau and ash-Sharah escarpment. For the present purposes, "Arabia Petraea" then can be defined as the region between Shobak in the north and Aqaba in the south, and Wadi 'Arabah to the west and Ma'an to the east.

It is widely assumed that Roman interest in this southern district of the Arabian province was negligible. Even during the last half century of Nabataean independence before the annexation, Petra has been characterized as already in decline. Rome's establishment of Egyptian ports in the Red Sea during the Augustan era and the rise of Palmyra presumably diverted far eastern trade away from the less efficient and more expensive overland trade routes through Arabia to Nabataea. Consequently, Petra's role as an entrepôt is thought to have virtually ceased by the mid-first century A.D. In the wake of its collapse, nomadic invaders from the Arabian peninsula supposedly penetrated the southern sector of the Nabataean realm, bringing about the fall of the important Nabataean center at Mada'in Šalih (Ḥegra) in al-Ḥijaz and disrupting the caravan routes across Transjordan, including the main trade route between Petra and Gaza across the Negeb.² In response to this crisis, Rabbel II (A.D. 71-106), the last Nabataean king, presumably initiated fundamental political and economic changes in the Nabataean state, promoting the development of sedentarized agricultural communities and shifting the capital of his realm further north to Bostra in the Ḥawran, near the borders of Roman Syria.³ After the annexation of the Nabataean kingdom in A.D. 106, Rome presumably maintained this administrative arrange-

¹G.W. Bowersock, 'The Three Arabia's in Ptolemy's Geography,' *Geographic historique au Proche-Orient (Syrie, Phénicie, Arabie, grecques, romaines, byzantines)*, Actes de la Table Ronde de Velbonne, 16-18 septembre 1985 (Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1988), pp. 47-53.

²A. Negev, 'The Nabataeans and Provincia Arabia,' *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* II/8 (Berlin/New York, 1977), p. 635. For criticism of this hypothesis see my discussion 'Rome and

the Saracens: Reassessing the Nomadic Menace,' in *L'Arabie préislamique et son environnement historique et culturel*, Travaux du Centre de Recherche sur le Proche-Orient et la Grèce Antiques 10 (Leiden, 1989), pp. 341-400.

³See Negev, *ANRW* II/8 (1977), pp. 635-640 and S. Sidebotham, *Roman Economic Policy in the Erythra Thalassa, 30 B.C.-A.D. 217* (Leiden, Brill 1986), pp. 148-155. For the shift to Bostra, see the comments of G.W. Bowersock, *Roman Arabia* (Harvard, 1983), p. 73 based on *C.I.S.* II, 218.

ment, with Petra retained only as a regional center for the southern confines of the province. With this subordinate status, Petra and its surrounding dependent settlements presumably faded into insignificance.

But any assumption of the eclipse of Petra conflicts with the mounting evidence that it continued to flourish under Roman rule. By A.D. 114, it received the honorific title of *metropolis* and was later elevated to the status of a *colonia* under Elagabalus, prior to the bestowing of either of these honors on the capital city of Bostra; in the reign of Hadrian, it was a regular juridical stop for the governor, Julius Julianus, in executing his administrative duties in the province; his successor, L. Aninius Sextius Florentinus, governor c. A.D. 127, even chose the city for his burial. During the third century, Callinicus and Genethlius, natives of Petra, were noted philosophers and rhetoricians active at Athens, attesting to the continued intellectual and cultural vitality of the city.⁴ None of this evidence suggests a sudden demise of Petra under Roman rule; in fact, the significance of the old Nabataean capital appears to have been maintained at least into the Byzantine era.⁵ Archaeological results emerging from the exploration of Arabia Petraea during my survey of the region between 1978 and 1989 offer further support for this prospering picture of the old Nabataean capital and its environs under Roman rule. In particular, the settlement pattern in the early imperial era, the transportation lattice of the region, and the military activities in the southern frontier zone belie any suggestion that the area dwindled into insignificance.

1. The Settlement Pattern

Hundreds of sites in Transjordan illustrate the zenith of Nabataean political fortunes and economic prosperity during the reign of Aretas IV (9 B.C.-A.D. 40). Many of these settlements are strung along the caravan routes for the prosperous incense trade. They extend from Hegra (Mada'in Šaliḥ) in al-Ḥijaz, the southern frontier of Nabataea to Bostra in Syria. Between Petra and Gaza, across the Negeb of Palestine, the cities of Oboda, Mampsis, Nessana, Sobata, and Elusa were centers of similar expansive activities. These developments are amply documented by literary sources, epigraphic evidence and archaeological remains. What remains obscure and problematic are the preceding and subsequent periods, involving the rise of the Nabataean state to prominence and its fate after the Roman incorporation of the kingdom into the empire. As suddenly and mysteriously as the Nabataeans enter the purview of our historical sources, they pass from our vision and fade out of existence in an equally inscrutable fashion. Of major interest is the contribution of

the recent survey to these two poorly known transitional eras.

The first literary reference to the Nabataeans is in the late fourth century B.C., when Hieronymus of Cardia locates them at Petra and identifies them as traders engaged in the profitable incense trade (*apud* Diodorus Siculus XIX.94). In the following centuries, they are found in the Ḥawran (P.S.I. 406) and northern Jordan (I Macc. 5.25-26), rather than Petra, where they appear to be a regular part of the landscape, not an intruding nomadic element. By the end of the second century B.C., they have established numerous villages further south along the coasts of the Gulf of Aqaba and the interior of North Arabia (Agatharchides of Cnidus *apud* Diodorus Siculus III.43). By the time of Pompey's eastern conquests, their striking rise to political and economic importance has already taken place. Archaeological evidence seems to confirm this picture of the sudden emergence of Nabataea into prominence during the first century B.C.

At this time, Nabataean settlements in southern Edom seemingly burst into existence overnight. Between the Augustan era to the annexation, Nabataean sites radiate out from Petra in all directions on the plateau. Even on the edges of the western ash-Sharah escarpment overlooking Wadi 'Arabah, Nabataean sites are dense.⁶ The same is the case along the southern edge of the escarpment overlooking the Ḥisma desert. Still visible here are the remains of terraced fields and reservoirs, reflecting earlier efforts to cultivate the soil and irrigate crops in the region. Surface finds imply they suddenly sprung up in the early Roman imperial era. Little evidence appears for the interval between the Edomite settlements of the fifth century B.C. and those of the first century B.C. Some Hellenistic remains are encountered at Petra, but few such finds appear elsewhere on the plateau. This substantial gap in occupation between the late Iron Age period and the early Roman era frequently has been emphasized.⁷ Of course, minimal excavations outside of the Petra basin render provisional any conclusions from this silence.

Moreover, earlier Nabataean settlements exist in the Ḥisma desert, where they are somewhat less expected. The average rainfall in this region is at most half of that received on the plateau. Such an arid environment appears to prohibit the development of any major settlements. One might suspect in this region only the existence of a few small roadstations and guardposts for caravans proceeding to Petra. But Glueck's pioneering survey of the area in the 1930s pointed in a strikingly different direction. Between Ras an-Naqab on the edge of the escarpment to Aqaba, his finds were substantial enough to propose an extensive Nabataean occupation for the ostensibly forbidding terrain.

⁴Bowersock, *Roman Arabia*, pp. 85-87, 134-135.

⁵P. J. Parr, 'The Last Days of Petra,' *The IV International Conference on Bilad al-Sham*, ed. M. A. Bakhit and M. Asfour (Amman, 1986), pp. 192-205.

⁶S. Hart, 'Some Preliminary Thoughts on Settlement in Southern Edom,' *Levant* 18 (1986), pp. 54-55.

⁷Most recently by Hart, *Levant* 18 (1986), p. 57.

Nestled in the crevices and bays of the mountains of the Ḥisma, he discovered enough dams, reservoirs and cisterns to postulate a sizeable Nabataean population for the region.⁸ Several of these settlements even appear to have originated in the Hellenistic period, prior to the great expansion of Nabataea during the early Roman imperial period.

For example, at Ḥumeima, 15km south of the escarpment, there is an extensive Nabataean settlement that later became an important Roman-Byzantine center. The settlement was founded purportedly by Aretas III (c. 85-62 B.C.), in the reign of his father, Obodas II (93-85 B.C.), according to Uranios' *Arabika* (apud Steph. Byz. 144, 19-26 = Jacoby, *FGH* 675, F A1, p. 340). An enclosed aqueduct was perhaps constructed at this time from several springs on the edge of the escarpment at 'Ain al-Qanah, 'Ain aj-Jamam and 'Ain ash-Sharah led to a reservoir at Ḥumeima. It represents one of the most impressive hydraulic technological achievements found anywhere in the Nabataean realm.⁹ In 1980, several Hellenistic sherds were found in my survey of the Nabataean quarter of the site of a possibly even earlier date: an Hellenistic bowl rim of the second century B.C. and an amphora handle of about the same era. The growth of the community in later periods is attested by an extensive quarry, numerous reservoirs and cisterns, a large cultic center, extensive remains of domestic buildings, a necropolis of several hundred rock-cut shaft-tombs, and large amounts of pottery sherds scattered over the immediate environs. The remains of several military constructions and a three-apse church offer the architectural vestiges of its importance in the Roman and Byzantine period, explaining its inclusion in such documents as the Peutinger Table, the Notitia Dignitatum, and the Beersheba Edict.

Another major Nabataean settlement in the Ḥisma is located at Wadi Ramm (ancient Iram), about 40km east of Aqaba. At the nearby mountain spring of 'Ain ash-Shellaleh, an aqueduct was constructed down to a reservoir in the valley about a kilometer from the settlement. A temple dedicated to the goddess 'Allat erected during the

last years of the reign of Rabbel II (A.D. 71-106) is the most prominent structure at the site. After the Roman annexation, but before the third century A.D., it apparently underwent several architectural renovations.¹⁰ Nabataean graffiti of the first century A.D. located 7km to the east are the product of priests engaged in the worship of the "goddess who is at Iram."¹¹ Thousands of pre-Islamic Thamudic graffiti collected in the region also contain petitions to 'Allat, and sometime Dushara, indicating a population under the cultural sway of Nabataea before the Roman annexation.¹² That occupation of the area preceded these developments is clear from Neolithic remains, Iron Age sherds, and Minaean graffiti of the Hellenistic era found in the vicinity of the temple at Ramm.¹³ The numerous springs in the valley obviously provided a basis for human settlement in various periods.

These two sites in the Ḥisma at least suggest the possibility of other Hellenistic settlements in Arabia Petraea, as existed at Petra and in the Negeb.¹⁴ However, elsewhere, it seems it is only in the first century B.C. that Hellenistic influence is detectable within Nabataea.¹⁵ This change has been connected with the reign of Aretas III (85-62 B.C.), whose Damascene Greek-inscribed coinage proclaims him as a "Philhellene."¹⁶ The Hellenistic pottery and literary tradition for the foundation of Ḥumeima suggest the epithet may have general significance. Intimate relations with the Hellenistic world even earlier are indicated by the embassy led by Moschion of Priene to Alexandria and the Arabs at Petra in 129 B.C.; Nabataeans from Petra also were active at Tenos and Rhodes in the same period.¹⁷ This evidence from the Aegean prior to Aretas III's reign suggests the second century B.C. Hellenistic finds at Ḥumeima may represent only the tip of the iceberg and provide some basis for projecting the discovery of other such evidence in Nabataea outside of Petra. The archaeological lacuna in Arabia Petraea may disappear with future excavations and intensified scrutiny of the region. Scattered finds of Hellenistic ceramics on the plateau have already occurred in the recent surveys.¹⁸ The substantial expansion of Nabatean sites that occurred in the

⁸See my discussion in 'The Nabataeans and the Hisma: In the Footsteps of Glueck and Beyond,' *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. C. Meyers and M. O'Connor (Philadelphia: ASOR), pp. 647-664.

⁹J.P. Oleson, 'Nabataean and Roman Water Use in Edom: The Humayma Hydraulic Survey, 1987,' *Echos du Monde Classique/Classical Views* 32 n.s. 7 (1988), pp. 117-129, at 120.

¹⁰D. Kirkbride, 'Le temple nabatéene de Ramm: Son évolution architecturale,' *Revue Biblique* 67 (1960), pp. 65-92, esp. 86.

¹¹R. Savignac, 'Le sanctuaire d'Allat à Iram,' *Revue Biblique* 41 (1932), pp. 585-594.

¹²See G.L. Harding, *Some Thamudic Inscriptions from the Hashemite Kingdom of the Jordan* (Leiden: Brill, 1952) for the initial collection of the graffiti from the region. Recent additions are being published by W.J. Jobling, Geraldine King, David Jacobsen and myself. The present corpus now constitutes several thousand inscriptions.

¹³[Neolithic]: D. Kirkbride, 'The Neolithic in Wadi Ramm: 'Ain Abu Nekheil,' *Archaeology in the Levant: Essays for Kathleen Kenyon*, ed. R. Moorey and P. Parr (Warminster, 1978), pp. 1-10; [Early Iron Age-Midianite] W.J. Jobling, *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 25 (1981), p. 110; [Iron Age II sherds]: discovered in 1980 at several sites between Wadi Ramm and Jabal Kharaza 20km to the north; [Minaean graffiti] G. Ryckmans, *Revue Biblique* 43 (1934), pp.

590-591 and D. F. Graf, *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 27 (1983), pp. 555-569.

¹⁴Summarized by Negev, *ANRW* II/8 (1977), pp. 545-549. Note also a Minaean inscribed scarab found at Petra that must date to the same period: RES 3927 = G. Garbini, *Iscrizioni sudarabiche: Iscizioni Minee* Vol. I (Napoli, 1974), no. 376. In 1980, Dr. Gary D. Pratico and I found a Rhodian jar handle at Tell al-Kheleifi, indicating activity at the Aqaba port during the Hellenistic era and suggesting the possibility of other such finds in the region.

¹⁵P.J. Parr, 'The Beginnings of Hellenisation at Petra,' *Le Rayonnement des Civilisations Grecque et Romaine sur les Cultures Périphériques, Huitième Congrès International d'Archéologie Classique* (Paris, 1965), p. 531.

¹⁶Y. Meshorer, *Nabataean Coins*, (Jerusalem, 1975), pp. 9-16.

¹⁷F. Hiller von Gaertringen, *Inchriften von Priene* (1906), no. 108.168, IG XII suppl. no. 307 [Tenos]; and SEG III, 674 with D. Morelli, *I Culti in Rodi* (Studi Classici e Orientali VIII; Pisa, 1959), pp. 127-128, for the cult of Dushares at Rhodes; cf. R. Wenning, *Die Nabatäer-Denkmäler und Geschichte* (Göttingen, 1987), p. 23.

¹⁸M. Lindner, 'Die zweite archäologische Expedition der Naturhistorischen Gesellschaft nach Petra (1976),' *Jahresmitteilungen der Naturhistorischen Gesellschaft Nürnberg* (1976), p. 96 [Sabra]; M. Weippert, 'Remarks on the History of Settlement in Southern Jordan during the Early Iron Age,' *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan* I, ed. A. Hadidi (Amman, 1982), p. 157 n. 29 [Basta]; and during our 1989 survey at Fardhakh, between Basta and Şadaqa.

time of Augustus may not be as sudden as it appears.

Other important results of the recent surveys pertain to the post-annexation period. Under Roman rule, a noticeable change can be observed in the extensive Nabataean settlement pattern that earlier existed in Arabia Petraea. Forward and outlying Nabataean settlements on the southern edge of the escarpment (FIG. 1) — Rujm Batra, Khirbet Naşara, Khirbet Thalajeh, Shudayyid, and Fuweilah — virtually cease under Roman rule.¹⁹ The same phenomenon appears to take place on the plateau and along the western edge of the escarpment.²⁰ In the Ḥisma desert, signs that Nabataean presence shriveled up in the region are even more apparent, perhaps signifying a withdrawal and retreat from Roman rule by the indigenous population. Of course, it could only reflect a shift or relocation of the population to elsewhere in the province, especially since Roman sites are concentrated and constricted along the major arteries of the region. Substantive expansion eastwards takes place again only in the Byzantine era. At certain locations on the plateau, such as between Ma'an and Udhrūḥ — at al-Ḥammam, al-Mutrab and Jabal aṭ-Ṭaḥuna, large Byzantine complexes emerge with little if any evidence of prior occupation.²¹ Since several independent investigations of the region have all concluded that there was a more limited occupation of the region during the Roman period, the impact of the Trajanic annexation on Nabataea begs for some historical explanation.

2. The Roman Road-System

For centuries prior to Roman rule, caravans had transported South Arabian aromatics to the various emporia and seaports of the Levant. The Nabataeans inherited and developed this *via odorifera* leading from southern Arabia to the various commercial centers of Syria-Palestine and the Mediterranean world. After the annexation of the Nabataean realm in A.D. 106, the Romans incorporated only the northern branches of this old incense route into their road-system. The major highway for the province of Arabia was constructed from Aela on the Gulf of Aqaba north to the capital at Bostra in southern Syria, the *Via Nova Traiana*. Inscribed milestones discovered along the route indicate that the project was completed under the governor Claudius Severus (A.D. 111-114) and help delineate its route between *a finibus Syriae usque ad mare*

rubrum.²² The northern sector is particularly well established as a result of these epigraphic remains, but the lack of such evidence for the southern sector has made the precise route through Arabia Petraea a matter of debate. Recent studies of the Trajanic road have even suggested that it bypassed Petra, running further east through Udhrūḥ on its way to Ail and Şadaqa.²³ However, there are compelling reasons for maintaining that Petra was a central point on the Trajanic road.

Firstly, the distances inscribed on the early milestones of the route found between Bostra and Amman are calculated from Petra, which evidently was the initial *caput viae* for the Trajanic road. Not until the Severan era were the distances recomputed from Bostra, indicating the primary status of Petra in the initial construction of the road.²⁴ Secondly, the *Tabula Peutingeriana*, the famous Medieval copy of a map of the Roman imperial road-system, lists Petra on the only north-south route it provides for Arabia (FIG. 2). Since the manuscript appears to be based on a prototype constructed prior to the third century A.D., this route must represent the Trajanic road.²⁵ Finally, at the turn of the century Brunnow and Domaszewski reported traces of a paved route with milestones between Shobak and Petra.²⁶ Stretches of this road can still be tracked for considerable distances east of the village of Ḥai to just several kilometers north of Wadi Musa (FIG. 3). On the basis of this evidence, the inclusion of Petra as an integral and important roadstation on the Trajanic road is placed beyond doubt; the route running past Udhrūḥ must be considered a secondary route that emerged later, but never replaced it. The extent that this southern sector of the Trajanic road in Arabia Petraea was developed reveals just how vital the route remained for Roman interests in the region.

The problem of tracking the Trajanic road between Petra and Aela was one of the objectives of our recent survey. In the far southern sector, milestones in the Ḥisma desert found between Quweira and Khirbet al-Khadeh and at Aqaba indicate the *Via Nova* passed through Wadi al-Yutum on the way south from Ḥumeima to Aela. Tracing the path of the Trajanic route north of Quweira through Ḥumeima to Petra is still problematic, but has been clarified greatly by our recent efforts. During the Ḥumeima regional survey of 1983, Professor John W. Eadie and I discovered some traces of the *Via Nova* just

¹⁹Although A. Musil, *The Northern Hegāz*, (New York, 1926), p. 45, described the 'watchtower' at Batra as 'Roman,' the pottery at the site is purely Nabataean.

²⁰A. Killick, *Udhrūḥ: Caravan City and Desert Oasis*, (Hampshire, 1987), p. 34, and Hart, *Levant* 18 (1986), p. 54.

²¹S.T. Parker, *Romans and Saracens: A History of the Arabian Frontier*, (Philadelphia: ASOR, 1986), pp. 100-102 [el-Hammam and el-Mutrab] and A. Killick, *Udhrūḥ: Caravan City and Desert Oasis*, p. 32 [Jabal al-Taḥuna].

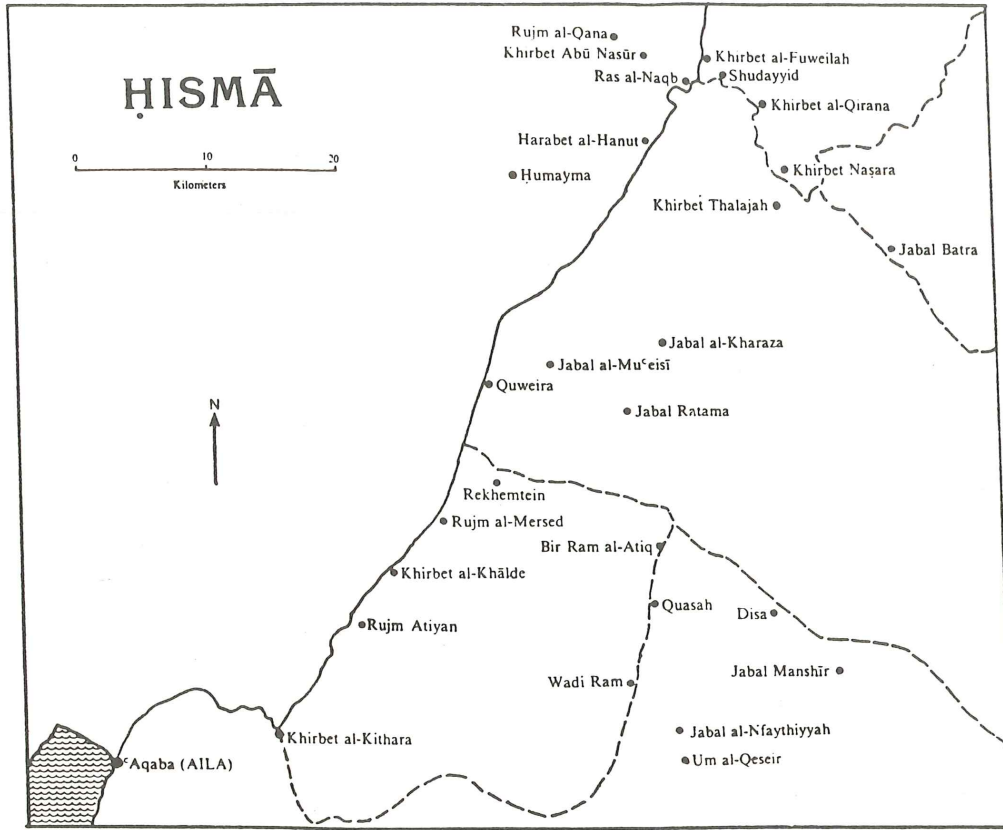
²²P. Thomsen, 'Die römischen Meilensteine der Provinzen Syria, Arabia und Palestina,' *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina Vereins* 40 (1917), pp. 1-103 is still fundamental, but T. Bauzou is preparing a much needed new list.

²³A. Killick, *Levant* 15 (1983), p. 110 and Parker, *Romans and Saracens*, p. 87, who followed Nelson Glueck's earlier proposal.

²⁴See the discussion of T. Bauzou, 'Les voies romaines entre Damas et Amman,' in *Géographie historique au Proche-Orient (Syrie, Phénicie, Arabie, grecques, romaines, byzantines)*, Notes et Monographies techniques no. 23 (Paris: Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1988), pp. 293-300.

²⁵Recently discussed by O.A.W. Dilke, *Greek and Roman Maps*, (Ithaca, N.Y., 1985), pp. 112-120.

²⁶Thomsen nos. 169-171.



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north of the settlement and tracked its path north some 15km to the point where it proceeded up the Sharah escarpment below 'Ain al-Qanah on the edge of the plateau.²⁷ Numerous milestones, stretches of pavement and several roadstations were recorded in the process (FIG. 4). All of the milestones are anepigraphic except for one of the Severan period found later in the 1989 season. What still needed to be determined was the path of the *Via Nova* between al-Qanah on the edge of the escarpment and Petra. Between 1986-1989, I extended the survey to this

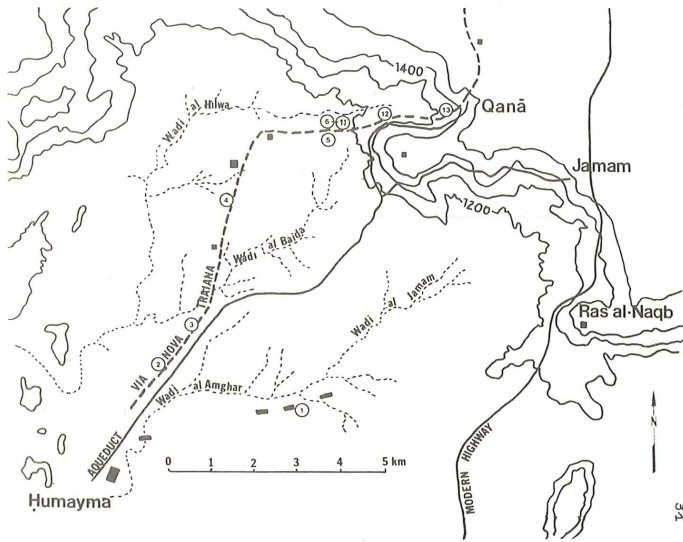


3. Paved stretch of the Trajanic road near Hai.

region of the plateau in an effort to establish this enigmatic segment of the Trajanic road.²⁸ As a result, the road has been traced from the edge of the escarpment north through Suweimira, Qurein, Khirbet Ɖor and Şadaqa. Seven

²⁷J. Eadie, 'Humayma 1983: The Regional Survey,' *Annual of the Department of Antiquities of Jordan* 28 (1984), pp. 214-216.

²⁸See my discussion of 'Les routes romaines d'Arabie Pétrée,' in *Le Monde de la Bible* 59 (1989), pp. 54-56 and 'The VIA NOVA TRAIANA between Petra and 'Aqaba,' *Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina Vereins* (forthcoming).

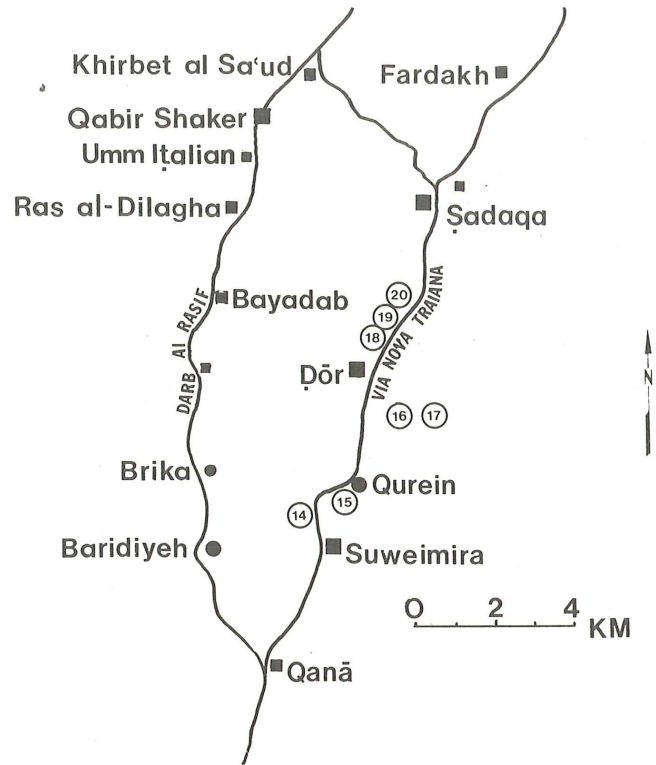


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milestones, several long stretches of pavement and a number of fortified points along this 10km segment ensure that this was the path of the Trajanic road across the plateau to Petra (FIG. 5).

Only the sector of the Trajanic road between Ṣadaqa and Petra remains undetermined. It has proven to be the most difficult link to establish, as several viable alternatives exist. Just north of Ṣadaqa, the road appears to have forked, presenting us with at least two options for this segment of the Trajanic road to Petra. One branch passes east by Fardhakh on the way to Ail and Baṣṭa, before proceeding through Wadi Jammaleh to Petra (FIG. 6). Several adjacent roadstations and forts were detected along the route, but it is marked only by a single milestone at Ail. Although uninscribed, it bears the remains of a painted Latin text that I have tentatively assigned to the era of Maximinus Thrax (A.D. 235-238). Perhaps this discovery explains why so many uninscribed milestones appear in this region. The other branch leading from Ṣadaqa to Petra heads west to Khirbet as-Sa'ud and then passes north by the Roman ruins at Ṭuliyah, Diqa, Dḥaḥa and Bir Ṣarah, on its way to Wadi Musa. An uninscribed milestone near Bir Ṣarah is the only milestone discovered along this route. Since both branches are accompanied by milestones, and the distances of each to Petra are approximately that given by the Peutinger Table, either could constitute the path of the *Via Nova* between Ṣadaqa and Petra. It remains for future research to clarify this section of the Trajanic route.

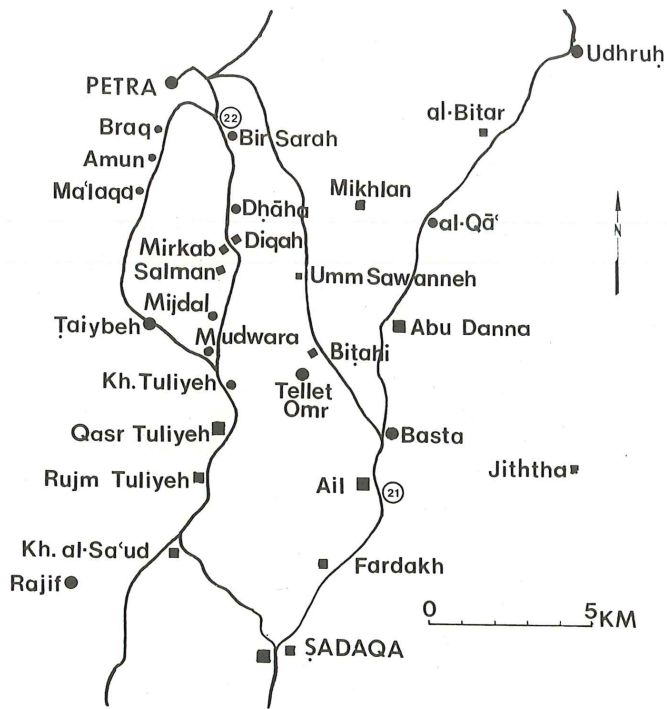
In addition to the *Via Nova Traiana*, several other routes and spurs appear to have developed during the Roman era. One of these runs along the western edge of the Sharah



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escarpment between Petra and al-Qanah. It lacks any milestones or signs of pavement, but it is clearly marked by two parallel low walls that served as its borders. It is known as *Darb ar-Raṣeef* by the local inhabitants of the region and popularly associated with the Ḥajj. However, numerous Nabataean-Roman sites strung along the route, suggest it represents an old Nabataean caravan route, later used during the Roman and Byzantine eras. Signs of activity during the Islamic period are absent. The clearest stretches are between Ras al-Qanah and Ras ad-Dilagha, about 3km west of Ṣadaqa. The segment between Dilagha and Petra is more difficult to trace, but it appears to have passed along the edge of the plateau overlooking ar-Rajif on the way to Khirbet as-Sa'ud and Ṭaybeh. This route along the edge of the escarpment continues by the settlements of Mu'alaqa, 'Ain Amun, and Khirbet Braq on the way to Wadi Musa and Petra. Further east, milestones discovered at Udhruh indicate that a major branch road diverted from the Trajanic road at Baṣṭa and passed through Abu Danna and by Udhruh on its way north, presumably of later construction.²⁹ Jaussen and others contended that this road

²⁹Brünnow and Domaszewski, *Die Provincia Arabia* I, p. 465-468 = Thomsen nos. 172-173.



6.

Madhkur, Qaşr as-Sa'idiyin and Gharandal also indicates occupation during the Nabataean-Roman period, but is silent for the Byzantine era, as is true for many of the Negeb sites on the route. This is strange since Gharandal is listed in Byzantine documents (the Aridella of the Notitia Dignitatum and the Beersheba Edict). Excavation of the sandswept ruins should reveal something from this epoch. The surface pottery from the site is sparse and badly eroded, and therefore hardly conclusive.

These numerous routes present a rather complex transportation lattice for the region of Arabia Petraea during the centuries of Nabataean and Roman occupation of the region. Focus on the Trajanic road has obscured these alternative routes, one of which at least obtained official status based on the presence of milestones. Lack of excavations of key sites and mainly anepigraphic milestones along the routes permit only a general assessment of the stages of its development, but it must have evolved slowly during the more than half a millennium that the region was under Roman administration. The substantial increase of settlements on the plateau during the Byzantine period must have contributed greatly to establishing this involved transportation network. Nevertheless, most of these later roads clearly followed the older Nabataean routes that existed long before the Roman annexation of the region. Their maintenance reveals that Petra continued to function as the central terminus and nucleus for the local population and traffic through Arabia Petraea. Their multiplicity serves to indicate just how important the former Nabataean capital remained during the Roman occupation of the region.

3. The Frontier Fortress System and Provincial Borders
 The nature and extent of Roman military presence in the south remains a vexed question. The only definite fortress system which has been located is a string of small *castella* along the Trajanic road between Petra and Aela on the Gulf of Aqaba. The *stationes* and *castella* at Ail, Şadaqa, Humeima, Quweira, Khirbet al-Khaldeh (FIG. 7) and Khirbet al-Kithara constitute the essential framework of this defensive system. Numerous smaller fortified posts are interspersed between these larger forts to help monitor and protect any traffic along the route. The most important of these on the plateau are the Roman forts at Fardhakh, Dor and Suweimira between Şadaqa and Humeima. The garrisons of these smaller military installations were clearly too limited for warding off any major attack and stand in marked contrast to the larger fortified zone of the so-called *limes arabicus* that existed further north on the plateau between Petra and Bostra.³³ The only evidence of any

passed south by Ras an-Naqab and down the escarpment, but we were unable to detect any sign of an ancient road headed in this direction.

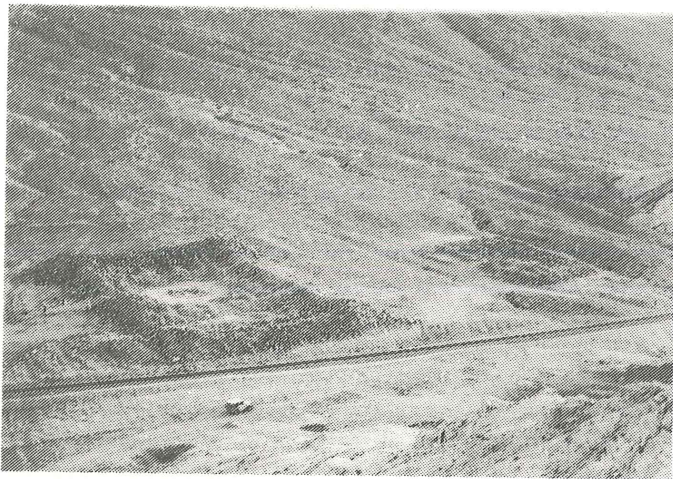
In addition to these major north-south routes, a number of east-west routes intersected these major north-south routes. Most of these had Petra as the nexus, from which they passed west across Wadi 'Arabah on the way to the Mediterranean ports and perhaps Egypt.³⁰ A route west from Şadaqa also appears to have passed down the escarpment through Dilagha to Gharandal on the eastern side of Wadi 'Arabah.³¹ There was also the important Petra-Gaza road that passed from Beida to Bir Madhkur and across Wadi 'Arabah through the Negeb to the Mediterranean port. The suggestion this road was abandoned after the annexation and not revived until it became an integral part of Diocletian's defensive system of the Negeb must now be rejected. Exploration of the key Negeb sites of al-Khalsa, Oboda, Meşad Sha'ar Ramon, Horbat Qaşra, and Mayet 'Awad have yielded evidence that the old Nabataean caravan route was maintained by the Romans in the second and third centuries A.D.³² Our investigation of the important military stations of Bir

³⁰F. Zayadine, 'Caravan Routes between Egypt and Nabataea and the Voyage of Sultan Baibars to Petra in 1276 AD,' *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan II*, ed. A. Hadidi (Amman, 1985), pp. 159-174.

³¹See Thomsen no. 187 for a milestone at Gharandal.

³²R. Cohen, 'New Light on the Date of the Petra-Gaza Road,' *Biblical Archaeologist* 45 (1982), pp. 240-247.

³³See S. T. Parker, 'The Roman *Limes* in Jordan,' *Studies in the History and Archaeology of Jordan III*, ed. A. Hadidi (London, 1987), pp. 151-164.



7. Roman *castellum* (left) and caravanserai (right) at Khirbet al-Khaldeh.

major revisions in this limited fortification system are several new constructions during the Byzantine period, a large fort at Udhrūḥ, the *castella* of al-Ḥammam and al-Mutrab several kilometers east of Ma'an, perhaps the fort at Qirana near the edge of the plateau, and a possible military encampment at Ḥumeima adjacent to an earlier small Roman *castellum*.³⁴ In spite of these additions to the fortification system, it still can hardly be designated a "defense in depth," despite the fact that numerous routes from the Arabian peninsula intersected this sector, which was in the path of the later Moslem conquests.

Roman activities in the Ḥisma, east of the *Via Nova*, seem limited to the environs of the Nabataean sanctuary and settlement at Wadi Ramm. A Nabataean graffito from the interior walls of the temple appears to be dated to the provincial era.³⁵ In addition, a Latin inscription on a small altar at the entrance to the sanctuary attests to a dedication made by a third century governor named Aurelianus.³⁶ Another dedication to the goddess at the nearby spring of 'Ain ash-Shellaleh was engraved in Greek by a *duplicarius* named 'Annianos, perhaps a native Arab recruit commanding a military detachment operating in the area.³⁷ A coin

of Marcus Aurelius and Roman and Byzantine sherds emerging from the excavations at the sanctuary provide corroboration of this Roman presence.³⁸ Elsewhere, at strategic points intersecting the valley and various points along the *Via Nova*, additional signs of activity in the Roman era were discovered during my survey: Late Roman and Byzantine sherds appear at the watchpost located at Rekhemtein (East of Quweira and north of Ramm), the campsite at Jabal Manshir (northeast of Ramm), the sanctuary at Umm al-Qeṣeir (southeast of Ramm), and at Rujm Kara (south of Ramm on the route leading to Kithara), all previously occupied by the Nabataeans. The region further south in the Ḥijaz is more difficult to ascertain.³⁹ Nevertheless, the safety and security of traffic along the important Trajanic artery between Ḥumeima and Aqaba was obviously of high priority for Roman military administration of the region.

Summary

Arabia Petraea can no longer be regarded as a basic wasteland, devoid of any significance in the Roman era. Surveys of the region have yielded substantial evidence for a dense population by the first century B.C., with sufficient hints that the roots of some of these settlements emanate from the earlier Hellenistic era. In fact, agricultural communities appear to have existed simultaneously with nomadic pastoralist communities from the beginning of the Nabataean state. With the Roman annexation in A.D. 106, an observable change in this demographic pattern took place. Roman settlements are less extensive and confined mostly to the path of the *Via Nova Traiana*. Either many Nabataeans abandoned the region after the annexation or were absorbed deeper within the settled area of the province. For it is not until the Byzantine era that the area east of the *Via Nova Traiana* was extensively cultivated again, as reflected in the substantial signs of agricultural activity all over the plateau. Nevertheless, Roman settlements along the major arteries leading to Petra indicate a vitality even for the early imperial period. This evidence provides an important basis for revising the popular view of the decline of Arabia Petraea under Roman rule.

³⁴Discussed by Parker in *Romans and Saracens*, pp. 94-108.

³⁵Savignac, *Revue Biblique* 44 (1935), pp. 265-268 [year 41 or 45]. The palaeography suggests a date of the provincial era, rather than the reign of Aretas IV as proposed by Negev, *ANRW* II/8 (1977), p. 287.

³⁶M. Sartre, *Trois études sur l'Arabie romaine et byzantine*, (Collection Latomus, Vol. 178; Bruxelles, 1982), p. 24, proposes Aurelius Aurelianus, known from a milestone at Bostra (*IGLS* XIII, 9101).

³⁷Savignac, *Revue Biblique* 42 (1933), pp. 405-407, Greek no. 2; cf. M. Rostovtzeff, *Revue Biblique* 43 (1934), p. 402. The name is perhaps Semitic, Nabataean ḥnywn ('Ḥunaynu'), the equivalent of Pre-Islamic Arabic ḥnn (cf. Arabic Ḥunain), a name which appears in three

Thamudic inscriptions from the region (see G. L. Harding, *Some Thamudic Inscriptions from the Hashemite Kingdom of the Jordan* [Leiden: Brill, 1952]; nos. 13, 100, 203) and occurs frequently in Safaitic.

³⁸Savignac and Horsfield, *Revue Biblique* 44 (1935), p. 259 [coin]; Kirkbride, *Revue Biblique* 67 (1960), p. 71 [pottery].

³⁹See my discussion of 'Qura 'Arabiyya and Provincia Arabia,' in *Géographie historique au Proche-Orient (Syrie, Phénicie, Arabie, grecques, romaines, byzantines)*, (Paris: CNRS, 1988), pp. 171-211; cf. P.-L. Gatier et J.-F. Salles, 'Aux frontières méridionales du domaine nabatéen,' in *L'Arabie et ses mers bordières I*, Travaux de la Maison de l'Orient no. 16 (Lyon, 1988), pp. 173-190.