

## **“Romanization” at Hawara (al-Ḥumayma)? The Character of “Roman” Culture at a Desert Fortress**

“Romanization” is a controversial term tied to ambiguous concepts of so-called “Roman” persons and so-called “Roman” culture and their relationships with so-called “non-Roman” persons and cultures, the latter all too often defined as the negative of the assumed Roman norm.<sup>1</sup> This paper will attempt to evaluate the nature of “Roman” culture at the desert settlement of Hawara, modern al-Ḥumayma, and its relationship to contemporary and subsequent cultural manifestations at the site. Although the terms “Roman” or “Romanization” will not always appear in quotation marks in the subsequent discussion, their ambiguity should be assumed. Units of the Roman army built a large fort at this small Nabataean village immediately after the formation of the Provincia Arabia in AD 106, and the question immediately arises of how their presence affected the cultural balance (Oleson 2001). The fort structure itself dominated the site, and artifacts found in the fort and adjacent bath building document new developments in diet, material technology, architecture, religion, and literacy. To what extent can the inhabitants of the fort be called “Roman” and any subsequent process of change at the settlement be termed “Romanization”?

Excavation has shown that the small settlement of Hawara appeared on an isolated desert stretch of the King’s Highway sometime in the mid-first century BC, supporting Uranius’ identification of Aretas III as the founder. The settlement flourished through pastoral and agricultural activity, its growth fostered by construction of an elaborate water-supply system and by the movement of people and goods along the ancient trade route (Oleson 1997). Large, well-cut Nabataean architectural elements found re-used in later structures around the site are the only surviving testimony of the temples or other elaborate public structures built during the first two cen-

turies of Hawara’s existence. Two substantial, block-built structures of this period — possibly a bath and a shrine — have been identified in reuse, one as the foundation of the second-century Roman bath (Oleson 1990), and another beneath a shrine in the fort *vicus*. Although very few Nabataean inscriptions or graffiti have been found at the site, the coinage, ceramics, hydraulic structures, and architectural elements of the first century AD are all typically Nabataean in character.

The “pre-Roman” culture of Ḥawāra and its environs can be reconstructed on the basis of archaeological evidence and ethnographic parallels (Oleson 2001: 570-72). The families of farmers and pastoralists moved about the region tending their crops and grazing their flocks where the soil, traditions of ownership, and run-off from winter rains allowed. Family-owned cisterns in the countryside, along with two rural reservoirs fed by the aqueduct, allowed family groups to live a comfortable existence in their tents, scattered throughout the large catchment area. Development of the town centre was fostered by the construction of two reservoirs fed by run-off, and one supplied by the 27km long aqueduct. Over time, private run-off cisterns were built, and later incorporated in the courtyards of stone-built houses (Oleson 1991). A significant portion of the population, however, probably continued to live in tents, which would be set up in the town as families responded to the draw of public watering facilities, markets or fairs, religious observances, political meetings, and nearby agricultural activities. This process can still be seen in small desert towns in Jordan, such as new al-Ḥumayma, Jafr, or al-Quwayra.

Caravans of merchants, royal officials, and Nabataean military units moving along the old King’s Highway, which passed through Hawara, kept the region in contact

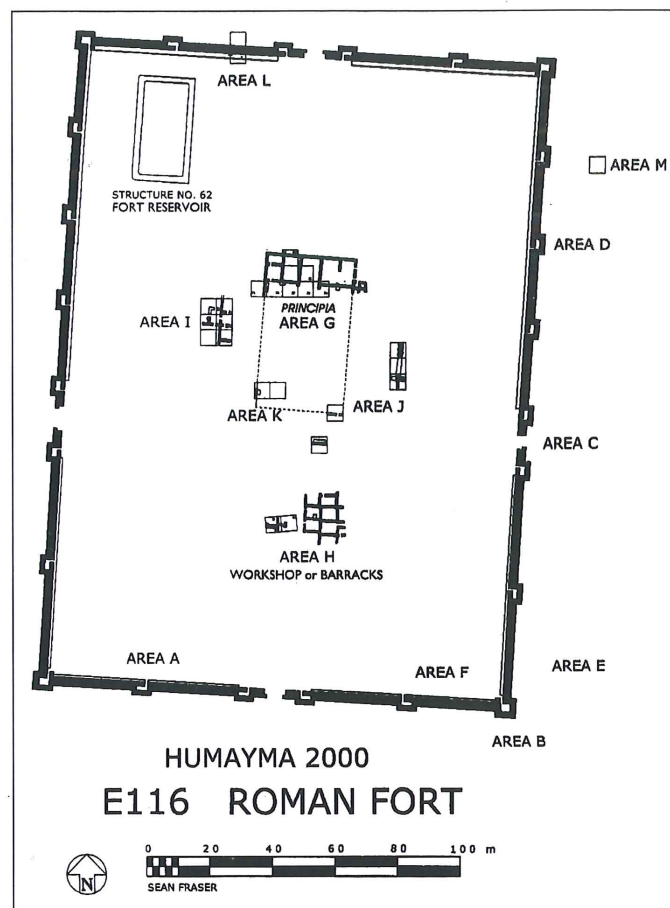
<sup>1</sup> The inscriptions from al-Ḥumayma described in this paper will be published in comprehensive form by Oleson, Reeves, Fisher (Forthcoming). Some of the information and interpretation that appears here was developed in collaboration with Reeves and Fisher, to whom I am grateful. Our interpretation of the inscriptions has benefited greatly from the advice of G. Bowersock, E. de Bruijn, L.

Koenen, J. Russell, and O. Stoll. The recent bibliography on Romanization is enormous. See in particular Woolf 1998 and Cherry 1998 for a history of the question; also Lewin 1994; Alcock 1997; Graham 1998; Isaac 1998; Ball 2000; MacMullen 2000, and Webster 2001.

with the outside. Distances to the heavily settled, Hellenized and Jewish cultural spheres north, west and south-west of the Nabataean heartland were relatively short, and passage was surprisingly easy for those who knew the desert, and by the first century BC the Nabataean culture and economy had already been significantly affected by contact with those regions (Schmidt 2001; cf. Dijkstra 1995: 297-307). There is epigraphic evidence for the activity of Nabataean merchants throughout the Aegean and in Italy itself in the first century AD (Wenning 1987: 22-24). The inhabitants of Nabataean Hawara participated in a rapidly evolving culture that was making traditionally non-Nabataean artifacts and practices their own—for example, coinage, literacy, military technology and organization, cistern design, public bathing, the theatre, wine-drinking, mosaic floors, and anthropomorphic sculpture. This transformation, however, was not imitative, but opportunistic, and the Nabataeans rejected, for example, absolutist monarchy, scientific urban design, Koine Greek (in favour of Aramaic), and the peripteral temple, and they resisted the temptations of cremation and the Pergamene baroque style of sculpture.<sup>2</sup> It is interesting that the elite of late Republican Rome eagerly adopted most of those very elements that the Nabataeans found inappropriate. In any case, both the Roman and the Nabataean cultures transformed what they borrowed, to suit their own taste and needs.

What was the nature of the initial Roman contact with Hawara? Significant Roman intervention in Nabataean affairs began in the 60sBC, but no substantial force of Roman soldiers is likely to have passed through the Hisma until the events of 106AD. Aelius Gallus' invasion of the Arabian Peninsula around 26BC by-passed the area (Bowersock 1983: 28-44, 46-49), although the force of 1,000 Nabataean soldiers that participated may have included individuals from Hawara. This sort of involvement affected Nabataean military organization, since ranks such as *hekatontarches* (centurion) appear by the mid-first century, although Graf (1994: 274-90) has proposed that their army was organized for the most part on Hellenistic Greek lines. Bowersock (1983: 55-57) has suggested that the kingdom was annexed briefly by the Romans around the third century BC, but no traces of this event have been found in the archaeological record so far.

The large fort is the first documented indication of a Roman presence at Hawara, as the Romans called it (FIG. 1). Excavation has shown that the fort was built in a single phase on an unoccupied piece of land on the edge of the Nabataean settlement early in the second century, probably only a few years after the conquest (Oleson *et al.* 1999: 414-21). Given the reuse in the fort of numerous



1. Plan of Fort.

structural elements from major Nabataean buildings—column bases, drums, and capitals (FIG. 2), door jambs, entablature—it is possible that at Hawara, as now seems to be the case at Petra (Schmidt 1997), we have evidence for the violent character of the Roman occupation of the Nabataean kingdom in 106. Does the destruction of public buildings and the reuse of their blocks elsewhere count as “Romanization”? One is reminded of the *sententia* Tacitus places in the mouth of a Briton facing Agricola's forces not many years earlier (Ag. 30.5): “ubi solitudinem faciunt, pacem appellant.” (“They create desolation and call it peace.”)

Numismatic, ceramic, and structural evidence indicate unbroken occupation of the fort through the second and most of the third century. An inscription found in 2000 (discussed below) reveals that a vexillation of the Legio III Cyrenaica, the only provincial garrison after about 127 AD, was stationed at the fort in the late second or first half of the third century, but it is not known whether a unit of this legion was stationed there from its foundation

<sup>2</sup> Ball 2000: 73 asserts that the Nabataeans practiced virtually all the variations in the treatment of the body at burial, but the design of

the tombs at Petra and elsewhere indicates that inhumation (either primary or secondary) was by far the prevalent rite.





2. Nabataean capital found in fort.

(Gatier 2000). A badly damaged inscription found in the fort may mention C. Bruttius Praesens, which would imply the brief stationing of a unit of the Legio VI Ferrata here as well, sometime between 106 and 127 (Cotton 2000; Syme 1988). The latter inscription originally consisted of two lines of tall (H ca. 0.05), narrow letters, occupying approximately the central 0.45m of the longer (south) side of a Nabataean pilaster base reused as a statue base (Oleson *et al.* 1999: 417). Only faint traces of letters can be detected for the first line, and nothing is legible. Traces of letters can be seen over 0.43m of the second line, but only 0.28m of the middle portion could be deciphered with even partial confidence, yielding approximately 13 letters. The tall proportions and tight spacing of the lettering resemble those of the Greek alphabet used on a dedicatory inscription to Trajan at Petra dating to 114 (Sartre 1993: 67-68, no. 37; Tracy 1999), and the Latin alphabet of the nearby, contemporary inscription of C. Claudius Severus (Sartre 1993: 73-74, no. 45). The NT of line 2 are ligatured.

1. (illegible)
2. ...]PRAESENTEMERAT (end?) or  
...]PRAESENTĒMLEGAT (end?)  
“...] governor (?)...was (?)...” or “...] Praesens  
(?)...Legat(us) (?)...”

The size of the fort and its isolated position on an important stretch of the *Via Nova Traiana*, indicate that significant strategic value was attributed to this post at the time of the conquest, so the dispatch of a legionary unit does not seem unreasonable. There is no pressing reason to postulate the presence of an auxiliary unit here prior to the arrival of the *Equites sagittarii indigenae* in the fourth century, documented by the *Notitia Dignitatum* (Or XXXIV.25). The *cohortes Ulpiae Petraeorum*, a Roman auxiliary force probably recruited from the Nabataean army by Trajan, seem to have been stationed outside the new province. Individual Nabataeans, however, were en-

listed into the occupying army fairly early in the new province’s history (Graf 1994).

The pattern of coin finds suggests a flurry of activity at the fort in the third quarter of the third century, then a possible evacuation during the reign of Diocletian, for whose reign no numismatic evidence has been recovered (Oleson *et al.* 1999: 415). The fort certainly was occupied during the reign of Constantine and his sons, either by a small auxiliary unit, possibly the *Equites sagittarii indigenae*, mentioned above, or by civilian squatters. Whatever their identity, these occupants modified some of the major interior structures for habitation, and dumped their own trash and that of the previous occupants in empty, disused rooms. Archaeological evidence shows that the fort was abandoned for good at the end of the fourth century, but the civilian settlement of al-Ḥumayma flourished during the Byzantine and Umayyad periods (Oleson 2001). The fort walls were used as a handy source of building stone, until they were finally covered by wind-blown soil. The Beersheba Edict records that in the mid-fifth century Auara, as it was called in Greek, paid the second highest tax bill in Trans-Jordan, reinforcing the image of prosperity suggested by the archaeological remains (Mayerson 1986: 143). In the later seventh century the Abbasid family bought al-Ḥumayma, as it is now called, and built their family *qaṣr* and mosque at the southeast edge of the settlement (Foote 1999). With the family’s departure to Baghdad in 749AD as part of their revolt against the Umayyad Caliph, the site was essentially abandoned.

What about the issue of “Romanization”? In order to understand how the Nabataean residents of Hawara reacted to the appearance of a Roman fort and its occupants, we must examine the cultural identity of the so-called “Romans” themselves. If a unit of the Legio VI Ferrata was indeed stationed at Havarra, the inhabitants encountered a commander of Italian origin-Bruttius Praesens-with a force that had spent time in Syria and by now included Roman citizens recruited in Syria and the Euphrates region (Cotton 2000). It is likely that any Nabataean who had traveled up the King’s Highway to the Decapolis area would have found these soldiers familiar; many probably spoke Aramaic as well as Greek. An inscribed altar found in 2000 in a shrine (FIG. 3) in the *vicus* south of the fort documents the presence of a vexillation of the Legio III Cyrenaica in the fort sometime in the late second or first half of the third century AD (Oleson *et al.* Forthcoming).

- |                |                                  |
|----------------|----------------------------------|
| 1. PR - SAL -  | Pr(o) Sal(ute)                   |
| 2. AVGG -      | Aug(ustorum)                     |
| 3. I]JOVI AMMO | I]jovi Ammo                      |
| 4. NI VEXILL - | ni vexill(atio) or vexill (arii) |
| 5. LEG III CYR | Leg(ionis) III Cyr(enaicae)      |



3. Shrine in *vicus*, view.

6. FEL - Fel(icis)

7. Q - D - F HAV Q(uae) D(ono) F(ecit) Hav(arrae)?  
or Q(ui) D(ono) F(ecerunt) Hav(arrae)?

8. CVM IVL[I]O PRISCO cum Iulio Prisco

“For the safety of the emperors, to Jupiter Ammon. A vexillation (or *vexillarii*) of the Third Legion Cyrenaica, Fortunate, which made (this) dedication (?) at Havarra along with (or under) Julius Priscus.”

Although the altar has been broken diagonally across line 6, the inscription has suffered only minor damage (to the beginning of lines 3 and 4, the middle of line 8), and the text can be read without difficulty. The letter *F* in lines 6 and 7 and the letter *D* in line 7 terminate below with a strong, horizontal, retrograde serif. The *F* of *praef* (*ectus*) in line 2 of the contemporary Petra Ridge Church inscription has a similar retrograde serif, but it slopes downward markedly (Bikai 1996: 484).

The dedication to Jupiter Ammon, the patron deity of the legion, is a reminder that by the time it was dispatched to Arabia in 106AD, this legion had been stationed in Egypt for over 125 years. At this point recruits were drawn for the most part from Egypt, with strong Syrian representation as well. They were native Greek speakers with deep family roots in the fascinating cultural mix of Greek and Semitic elements typical of the eastern Mediterranean in the early Empire. Papyrus Michigan 466 is indicative – a letter sent home to Alexandria in 107 by a young soldier in a unit of the Legio III Cyrenaica stationed somewhere near Petra. The document is written in Greek, is full of Greco-Egyptian names, and invokes Serapis (P. Mich. 466, Speidel 1977: 691-94).

The last line of the inscription may be an addition of the mid-third century AD commemorating C. Iulius Pris-

cus, the brother of Philip the Arab, *Praefectus Mesopotamiae* and *Rector orientis* under Philip from 244 (Pflaum 1960-61: II, 831-39, no. 324a; Millar 1993: 155-57). Alternatively, the entire inscription may date to Philip's reign. In any case, in Philip himself, a so-called “Arab” from Shahba near Damascus, we see an example of the ascension of some form of Arabic culture to imperial rank (Bowersock 1983: 121-28). Does this constitute “Romanization”, or the converse?

The two inscriptions cited so far were composed in Latin, an indication either of their official character or of the cultural background or cultural pretensions of their dedicants. The Latin language had no effect whatsoever on the inhabitants of Havarra, as far as we can tell, since no other Latin inscriptions, graffiti, or ostraca have been found at the site in ten years of survey and excavation.<sup>3</sup> The very few other inscriptions and graffiti found in the fort were all written in Greek, although one inscribed altar was dedicated to the Roman deity Ζεὺς Μεγίστος Καπιτώλιος, Jupiter of the Capitoline.

1 ΔΙΙΜΕΓΙCΤΩ[Ι]	Διὶ Μεγίστῳ
2 ΚΑΠΕΤΩ[ΛΙ]	Καπετῷ [λί]
3 ΩΙΑΔ [lost?]	ὦ Ἀδ[ριάν?]
4 ΟCΑΓΡΙΠΠΙΑ[Σ]	ὸς Ἀγρίππα[ς?]
5 [vacat? or lost?]	[ἀνέθηκε?]

“To the greatest Zeus Kapitolios...Hadrianos son of Agrippa (?) [dedicated it?].”

The customary use of Greek by Roman soldiers occupying the Provincia Arabia is best symbolized by the famous graffiti pecked on a rock face in the Ḥiṣmā by Laurikios sometime in the second or third century: ΠΩΜΕΟΙ ΑΕΙ ΝΙΚΩΣΙΝ..., “Romans are the champs!” (Sartre 1993: 172-73, no. 138).

Would the use of Greek outside the fort at Havarra be a sign of “Romanization”? Perhaps, but there is little evidence that it was spoken or written in the civilian settlement before the Byzantine period, except in the small *vicus* associated with the fort. Here, one structure was decorated in the third century with figured frescoes of gods in typical Greco-Roman style, one of them labeled Kleivw (Clio), the Muse of History (Oleson *et al.* 1999: 422). It seems appropriate that she alone of all her sisters — at least some of whom must also have appeared in the fresco — has survived the ravages of time. It is possible the structure was built by a Hellenized and Romanized local and decorated in Eastern Roman style to impress his compatriots, or his soldier friends. But given the proximity of the shrine containing the altar dedicated by a vex-

<sup>3</sup> Note the comment of Isaac 1992: 65 that “only two decades after the organization of the province of Arabia a military officer [Priscus] was engaged in administrative duties in a town [Rabbat Am-

mon], and that his attestation had to be translated from the Latin [into Greek].”





4. Mosaic in possible praetorium.

illation of the Third Legion, this may also be the habitation of a retired soldier. Greek *dipinti* were also found on some ceramics used in the house.

What other aspects of life in the fort during the second and third century set its inhabitants apart from the civilian inhabitants of Havarra and may have shaped their way of life? The fort itself, of course, which is typically Roman in design. But the civilians had no need of a fort. Their settlement had never been walled, since, as Hieronymus of Cardia perceptively observed (in Diodorus 19.94.2-10), the desert was the only fortress the Nabataeans required. Once the fort was abandoned around 400, it served only as a quarry. The appearance of frescoes representing brightly coloured stone panels on the walls of the *principia* and *praetorium* in the fort might be considered a "Roman" characteristic, but the designs find many parallels in the pre-Roman Near East, and outside the Fort they reappear only in the house in the *vicus* mentioned above. In 2000 it was discovered that several rooms in the *praetorium* had been paved with mosaic floors during the initial construction period (FIG. 4). This detail might seem an expression of "Romanness," since no mosaics have been found elsewhere at the site. Details of the geometric designs, however, are identical to those of two mosaic floors in pre-Roman Nabataean villas recently excavated by K. 'Amr at Wādī Mūsā ('Amr in Bikai and Egan 1997: 516, Fig. 18). It looks as if a team of Nabataean mosaicists was at work in the headquarters of this Roman fort immediately after the conquest. Is this "Romanization" of a Nabataean site, or "Nabataeanization" of a Roman fort, or is it "Hellenization" at second hand?

At some point in the second century, a Roman-type bath heated with a hypocaust was constructed 80m southwest of the fort. This might look like "Romanization" of the community, but in fact Roman military baths frequently were constructed just outside the forts they served, to avoid the hazards of fire, idleness, and disorder



5. Roman stop-cock applied to aqueduct reservoir.

(Oleson 1990: 294-306; Reeves 1996; Reeves and Oleson 1997). In addition, small-scale Hellenistic baths around the eastern Mediterranean had already familiarized the Nabataeans with the custom of public bathing, and they built baths during the first century BC and AD at Petra, Wādī Ramm, Khirbat Moah, Horvat Ma'agura, Avdat, and possibly Khirbat adh Dhariḥ. The bath at al-Ḥumayma was constructed over a derelict Nabataean building that may have served as a bath itself. One detail of the bath system, however, is quintessentially Roman. The open-gutter aqueduct that had passed by the Nabataean building below the Roman bath was replaced in the Roman period by a lead pipe system drawing on the reservoir fed by the Nabataean aqueduct. The flow of water into this pipe was controlled by a bronze stop-cock, precisely one Roman foot long (296mm) (Oleson 1988: 163, pl. XXX.1) (FIG. 5). This type of water valve is a common artifact in the Roman west (Fabio and Fassitelli 1990; Hodge 1992: 322-31), but-as far as I can determine-the example from al-Ḥumayma is the only one so far known from the Roman Near East. Can this technological intrusion at last be cited as evidence of Romanization: the application of a typical Roman stop-cock to a typical Nabataean reservoir? More likely, the technological detail simply indicates that Roman officers had confiscated the overflow of the reservoir for use in a bath constructed for the use of the soldiers. Some of the water-supply flowing into the reservoir had already been diverted through a branch aqueduct into the reservoir inside the fort.

The use of Roman coins in the fort was, indeed, a "Roman" habit on the part of the soldiers, but the inhabitants of Hawara were already familiar with this technology. 21 Nabataean coins have been identified at al-Ḥumayma, as opposed to 23 Roman coins of the second and third century, along with one surprise, a dupondius of Domitian. Of these 24 Roman coins, 17 were found in the fort, as opposed to 7 found elsewhere. This might seem a sig-



nificant proportion despite the small size of the sample, except that 6 of the 21 identified Nabataean coins were also found in the fort. The appearance of Roman coins in the community hardly seems a good example of “Romanization” when the exchange was going both ways. In the fourth century, the last period for which coins are found in the fort, the proportions are more equal: 41 coins found in the fort as opposed to 36 in the civilian community, but by this time, of course, there were no Nabataean issues.

To be sure, the diet and cooking habits of the soldiers were somewhat different from those of the locals. Naturally the staple meat was sheep and goat, but the soldiers also ate much more pork than the locals (cf. King 1999: 187; MacKinnon 2001), more chickens (or their eggs), a small amount of beef, and surprising quantities of oysters, probably brought in from ‘Aqaba by express camel. Not surprisingly, the townspeople seem to have been better than the soldiers at bringing home game animals (Oleson 1997: 179-81). So far, only one sherd of a Mediterranean Roman period wine amphora — elsewhere a type artifact of “Romanization” — has appeared in our excavations, and that in the civilian settlement. The soldiers may have imported their wine in skins, but it seems strange that no Egyptian wine was brought in amphoras from Aila, either for the fort or the civilian settlement. Perhaps beer was brewed locally.

To judge from the higher proportion of flat-bottom saucepans in the fort compared to round-bottom cooking pots, the soldiers also preferred to fry their food rather than boil it, a western Roman characteristic (Hayes 1997: 78-80, Berlin 1993). Saucepans are very rare outside the context of the fort. On the other hand, virtually all the fine ware and much of the coarse ware used in the fort during the second century was completely Nabataean in character, purchased from local or regional sources.

In summary, what cultural attributes set the “Roman” soldiers of Havarra apart from the civilians of Hawara? The occasional use of Latin, and a likely preference for spoken Greek over Aramaic or Nabataean, a taste for bacon and eggs rather than goat stew, and a predilection for raw oysters of suspect freshness — in other words, not a great deal. In what ways did the presence of the garrison affect the culture of the civilian settlement? The soldiers probably provided the locals with a handy local market for their livestock, cheeses, ceramics, and textiles, paid for in Roman coins or taken as a form of taxation in kind — but the local inhabitants do not show any indication of having been affected by the culture of the soldiers. The

soldiers were essentially a police force with an impressive headquarters complex and a fine bath; probably well-disciplined and generally disinterested in the traditional rhythms of life at Hawara.<sup>4</sup>

It is interesting, however, that the shrine where the altar with the Latin inscription dedicated to Jupiter Ammon was found also contained a dedication to Zeus Serapis inscribed in Greek, along with an uninscribed Dushara block. The archaeological context and the letter shapes suggest that Serapis inscription dates to the late second or first half of the third century.

- |                       |             |
|-----------------------|-------------|
| 1. ΑΠΟΛΛΩC            | Ἀπολλῶς     |
| 2. ΔΙΟCΚΟΡΟΥ          | Διοσκόρου   |
| 3. ΜΩΡΟCΥΠΕΡ          | Μῶρος ὑπέρ  |
| 4. ΕΥΧΑΡΙCΤΙ          | εὐχαριστί   |
| 5. ΑCΑΝΕΘΗ            | ας ἀνέθη    |
| 6. ΚΕ [ . . ] Ε[ . .  | κε[ν Δι]έ[ι |
| 7. CΕ [ . ] ΑΠΙΔ[ . . | Σε[ρ]άπιδ[ι |

“Apollo, son of Dioskoros, (called?) Moros, in thanksgiving dedicated it to Zeus Serapis.”

The contents of this shrine constitute a metaphor for the character of “Romanization” at Hawara. The Latin inscription is a dedication to Jupiter Ammon, an Egyptian manifestation of that deity, on behalf of an emperor of “Arabian” origin. The dedication to Jupiter under the guise of Serapis is written in Greek, the *lingua franca* of the eastern Mediterranean world. The Dushara block, in contrast, very Semitic in its form and meaning, is mute (see FIG. 3).

“Romanization” has recently come to be seen as a process in which the colonizers and the colonized, both elite and non-elite, borrowed from each other and created a new culture, a process comparable to “Creolization” in the New World (Webster 2001). The result was not the replacement of one way of life by another, but a blending of both which continued to evolve as long as there is a connection with the political, cultural, or economic sources. The people of Hawara, however, were distant from the eastern and western centres of the Roman Empire, and their culture had already been significantly changed by contact with their Hellenized neighbors. The “cultural logic of Romanization” — as Woolf puts it (Woolf 1995: 341) — seems to have meant remarkably little in the very demanding environment of the *Ḥisma*.

The Roman soldiers of Havarra were very different in culture from the Roman soldiers of the Middle Republic, but they did manifest to some degree the epigraphic habit

<sup>4</sup> This is essentially the same hypothesis supported on a broader scale for the frontier area by Isaac 1998: *passim*, 1992: 65; cf. also Lewin 1994 for southern Provincia Arabia and Cherry 1998 for the African frontier. Note Cherry 1998: 74: “There is no basis for believing that the Romans’ purpose in Algeria was to defend the local population

of the land it cultivated against incursions by (semi-)nomadic peoples... And there is no good evidence of any kind to show that their intention was to make north Africans into Romans, or pastoralists into sedentarists. ...the soldiers stationed there were meant to function primarily as an army of occupation.”



typical of Romans. It is interesting that this habit, which impressed so many provincial cultures, seems to have made no impression on the Nabataean civilians of Roman Hawara. Such a non-reaction may be a symptom both of the cultural conservatism of the natives and of their disinterest in the occupants of the fort. In fact, literacy of any kind seems to have been a technology of limited importance for these particular provincials. The absence of monumental Nabataean inscriptions in the Roman period is not particularly surprising, but it is interesting that only one inscribed tombstone and one possible monumental public inscription predating the Roman occupation have been found in the settlement. The others may have been destroyed, or hidden through re-use as building blocks, or simply not yet been excavated. It is also possible that the monumental inscriptions were painted rather than carved, as may have been the practice on the tombs at Petra (McKenzie 1990: 33). Arguments from absence are always risky, but after 10 campaigns of survey and excavation the pattern at al-Ḥumayma should have some basis in reality. The inhabitants of Nabataean Hawara, although possessing at least some monumental stone buildings and located on an important trade route, apparently had little need of written messages on a monumental, public scale. They also seem almost never to have written on their pottery or their walls. The literacy of the Nabataeans at Hawara was that of succinct, direct, individual assertion of family connections pecked into the bedrock, greetings to their fellow travelers in the desert, enlivened by caricatures of themselves and the animals that were part of their world. The gulf between the original culture of this small desert settlement and that of the Roman administrators may have been wider than the superficial similarities of material culture suggest, and the local character remarkably resistant to change. In any case, it can be seen that "Romanization" is not an appropriate term to apply to the cultural interaction that took place at Hawara in the second and third centuries AD.

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